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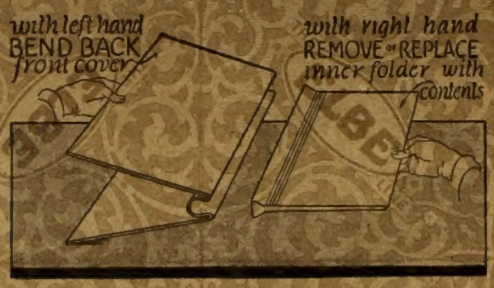

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dissertation

THE FAILURE OF THE POETICAL DRAMA IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

With Special Attention to

BROWNING, BULWER-LYTTON, AND TENNYSON

by

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(A.B., Boston University, 1912;
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submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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PREFACE

REVIEW OF WORK OF OTHER INVESTIGATORS

The poetic drama of the Victorian Era is unfortunate in having found, as yet, no historian to relate its progress and development. There is no book that I know of which takes for its subject the Victorian Poetic Drama. Fragmentary references to the dramatic writings of the great poets of the age, it is true, are scattered through the field of nineteenth century English literary criticism, but they are, for the most part, sporadic, casual, and random.

Practically all critics interested in the progress of Victorian drama from the standpoint of the commercial theater ignore the poetic drama entirely. On the other hand, most of the critics interested in the history and analysis of Victorian poetry bestow but a brief glance upon the poetic drama of the age.

The attitude toward the poetic drama of the nineteenth century taken by Allardyce Nicoll in his "British Drama", 1925, is typical of the point of view of all the dramatic historians with whose works I am familiar. In the Preface to his book Nicoll gives his readers the following explanation of his neglect to cover this field. He says:

SUMMARY

REVIEW OF BOOK ON VICTOR HUGO'S DRAMAS

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The attitude toward the poetic drama of the nineteenth century taken by Alexander Nicoll in his "British Drama", 1925, is typical of the point of view of all the critics in literature with whose works I am familiar. In the Preface to his book Nicoll gives his readers the following explanation of his neglect to cover this field. He says:

" Regarding the drama as inseparable from the theater, I have dealt but slightly with that remarkable activity in poetic playwriting which extended from 1795 to the end of the nineteenth century. Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, and the rest were great poets, but for the most part they were poor dramatists, and even Byron declared that he wrote most of his dramas for the closet rather than the stage. They can claim, therefore, no more than scant attention in a work which is intended as an outline of English dramatic, and theatrically dramatic, literature."

William Archer in his "The Old Drama and the New" ignores the poetic dramatists of the nineteenth century as an insignificant factor in the dramatic progress that he is studying. In a book of three hundred ninety-six pages, for instance, here is his total reference to the dramatic work of Alfred Tennyson:

" I will confess that -- apart from Mr. Hardy's 'Dynasts,' a magnificent epic rather than a drama -- Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' seems to me, of all the Elizabethanizing products, that which has most of the breath of life in it. If Tennyson had taken to drama earlier in life, and had been at the pains of studying its laws, I believe he had in him the makings of a great playwright. Even that comparatively feeble work 'Becket' had sufficient vitality to provide Sir Henry Irving with one of his most impressive characters." (1)

" Meanwhile Henry Irving was establishing his reign at the Lyceum. . . He produced in the seventies two notable works . . 'Charles the First,' by W.G.Wills, and 'Queen Mary,' by Alfred Tennyson; but neither took a permanent place on the stage." (2)

Brander Matthews in his "A Study of the Drama" includes a chapter of twenty-two pages on "The Poetic Drama and the Dramatic Poem." However, he discusses these forms merely as types making but the slightest of

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(1) Archer, William: The Old Drama and the New; page 51
(2) Ibid.; page 270

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(1) Archer, William: The Old Drama and the New; page 31
(2) Ibid.; page 270

references to specific poetic plays.

Many of the most provocative and stimulating critical opinions on this subject are found in the form of short discursive comments wheeling away from some other field more significant as a factor in the development of the literature of the century.

THE FAILURE OF THE POETICAL DRAMA IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

With Special Attention to

BROWNING, BULWER-LYTTON, AND TENNYSON

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INTRODUCTION

Decadent Condition of Poetic Drama in the Victorian Era

The nineteenth century saw a revival of the poetic play in England, a revival which, in the Victorian Era, reached its climax in the stage productions of Browning, Bulwer-Lytton, and Tennyson. Instead, however, of another Elizabethan effulgence, or a burst of tragic song such as old Greece knew, we find only a mediocrity which degenerated very often into dullness, weakness, and vapidness. Most of the poets of the century tried hard to produce a great poetic play, and, with a few notable exceptions, most of them failed. Certainly such men as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Tennyson, and Browning did not lack poetic genius -- what was the reason, then, that they failed to reach the heights so easily attained by Shakespeare, Racine, Alfieri, Goethe, Schiller, and Rostand? There is no doubt that the poetic tragedies of the latter carry within them a sense of life, a winged spirit, which the nineteenth century poets failed utterly to create. True poetic drama has about it a beauty and "coloring of imagination," a profound wisdom that we have learned to associate with the seeing eye of the poet, an intuitive understanding of human existence which we should be loath to feel has gone forever

from the English stage.

Brander Matthews says:

"The divorce between poetry and the drama, visible in England's literature in the nineteenth century, is acknowledged to be most unfortunate for both parties to the matrimonial contract; and those of us who have a warm regard for either of them cannot help hoping that they may be persuaded soon to make up their quarrel and get married again. The theater is flourishing more abundantly than ever before; and the prose-drama of modern life, dealing soberly and sincerely with the present problems of existence, has at last got its roots into the soil, and is certain soon to yield a richer fruitage. Perhaps it is even not too much to foresee the possibility of a speedy outflowering of the drama in the next half century, in the English language, as well as in the other tongues. In all the earlier epochs of dramatic expansion, the masterpieces of the art have been truly poetic in theme and in treatment. Have we any reason to suppose that our coming drama will also be poetic, both in essentials and externals?

"If the law of supply and demand were as potent in the arts as it is in commerce, we should be justified in expecting that return of the poetic drama, which is eagerly awaited by all who cherish the muses. But when we station Sister Ann on the watch-tower, and when we keep on asking if she sees any one coming, we ought to have in our own minds a clear vision of the rescuer we are looking for. When we cry aloud for the poetic drama, what is it that we stand ready to welcome?" (1)

Brander Matthews's question is pertinent: What do we demand in the poetic drama? Surely the essentials of a successful play are the same, whether the play be written in verse or in prose. Scientific inventions, social and material conditions may alter or render obsolete certain stage traditions and conventions, but beneath all this surface alteration, the basic essentials of a good play

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(1) Matthews, Brander: A Study of the Drama, Chapter XII, part I

remain immutable, fixed, and eternal because they are the stuff of which the very drama itself is made. They are the life blood which, distorting Burke's memorable phrase, "pervades, feeds, unites, invigorates, vivifies every part" of the drama "down to the minutest member." Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, and O'Neill may have been separated by centuries of time, but they are all together on one high plane of dramatic art in their constructive ability, in their skilful mastery of technique, and in their remarkable power to interpret the passions that motivate the lives of men. As Wordsworth so beautifully puts it in his preface to his "Lyrical Ballads," they think and feel "in the spirit of the passions of men" and although the ways of men change, their passions do not change nor alter with the years -- they are abiding, "as immortal as the heart of man." They will be the material out of which the last drama will be made, just as they were the impulse which called the first into being.

Essentials of Successful Drama, Whether Poetical of Prose

Laws may be formulated for the drama by critics, but the real test of a play has always been, and always will be, its theatrical effectiveness. The great dramatists were all popular playwrights in their own times. Shakespeare was a popular playwright and the idol of the people of London. The plays of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Corneille, Molière, Alfieri filled the theaters when they were first

produced. Goethe recognized this fact; he says of Shakespeare:

> "Shakespeare, in writing his pieces, could hardly have thought that they would appear in print, so as to be told over, and compared one with another; he had rather the stage in view when he wrote; he regarded his plays as a lively and moving scene, that would pass rapidly before the eyes and ears upon the stage, not as one that was to be held firmly, and carped at in detail. Hence, his only point was to be effective and significant for the moment." (1)

The great dramatist puts into his play many things which the public as a whole may not appreciate, but it is always for the public as a whole that he writes his plays. As Dryden declared:

"They who have best succeeded on the stage
Have still conformed their genius to the age."

Molière again and again emphasized the fact that the play produced in the theater before a satisfied audience had fulfilled its mission. In the preface to his "Precieuses Ridicules" he expresses his willingness to accept the test of theatrical effectiveness as the sole test of the worth of his play. He reflects this sentiment, too, in the preface to his "Amour Médecin" in which he says "comedies are written only to be acted."

The story of the Victorian drama exemplifies most clearly that the drama of any age must be the product of its own day and the heritage of all the past centuries of theatrical growth. Paradoxial as it amy seem, the theater

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(1) Clark, Barrett H. : European Theories of the Drama; page 336

is at one and the same time the most progressive and the most traditional of all the interpretive arts. Like a mighty tree it carries within it the rings of its gradual development, and upon each ring is inscribed the name of a life-giving inspiration. One age receives its impetus from the other; each inherits its inspiration from the past. Yet, at the same time that the drama looks back through the ages to these eternal sources of inspiration, like two-headed Janus it must keep another face forward, keenly awake to the changing trends of its particular day and generation. But whether it looks backward or forward for its inspiration, there are certain abiding characteristics in all truly great plays. Whether written by Sophocles or O'Neill, great plays are alike in their interpretation of the fundamental emotions motivating the actions and conduct of men; they are alike in their sense of humanity and in the universality of their emotional appeal.

The fact that we find in the nineteenth century, in spite of the efforts expended by poetic genius, a pedestrian drama, incapable of soaring to the perfection of the past, incapable, too, of making itself an interpretation of the present, causes us to wonder if, indeed, the poetic play be an evanescent thing. Can it be, we wonder, that the verse form is a worn-out vehicle of dramatic expression, no longer suited to the exigencies of the modern

commercial theater? As an interpretation and a pattern of modern life, must the drama be divorced from the beauty, the nobility, the strength and power which characterized it at its noblest poetic heights? Or may it be that the vehicle of verse would still perform its dramatic function if nature would but send again to the English stage that rarest of all literary geniuses -- the poetic-dramatist? Only a minute analysis of the poetic drama of the Victorian Age will reveal which supposition is correct. However, before we can attempt to estimate the value of the Victorian poetic drama, we must look first at its inception in the Romantic Revival, and at its hand-in-hand progress with Romanticism into the nineteenth century.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF POETIC DRAMA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY UP TO THE VICTORIAN ERA

Influence of Romantic Movement on Drama of Day

More and more, as the eighteenth century wears to a close, we begin to detect those various social, intellectual, and imaginative changes that mark the beginnings of the Romantic Movement in England. The most potent influences were those of Rousseau in France and Godwin in England. The poetic mind of the age breathed this revolutionary atmosphere, though it was not always conscious of the influence; but the drama of the day was slow to feel the effects of the new doctrines. The torch of Romanticism was carried forward by a few pioneers, who stood "upon the forehead of the age to come" and pointed the way to a new era. The stage, however, is more dependent upon the point of view of the people, and hence was slow to reflect the new philosophy until it had permeated the general mind. The abstractions of revolutionary theory have no place in the theater.

The doctrines inherent in the Romantic Movement, therefore, contributed almost nothing of immediate significance to the stage of its day. The drama could not go back to nature with Rousseau because it presents, primarily, an image of life as it is. Although through the drama we see a vision of the heights and depths of which

life is capable, we glimpse this through the concrete world of actuality as it is. Of all the various types of literary interpretation, the drama is the least subjective. The essence of the Romantic Movement was subjectivity; the essence of the drama, objectivity.

Subjectivity of Romanticism Alien to Objectivity of Drama

All of the Romanticists from Burns to Browning were introverts, men who sent their thoughts inward into the recesses of their own innermost beings. Edmund Gosse says:

"The general course of the last hundred years in English literature has been one of individualism as a strong current, every now and then unsuccessfully fretted by attempts at reaction. The form that this individualism has taken has been mainly that of self-study and self-revelation. The seventeenth century was all phenomenal and dramatic, with stormy fits of external observation. The eighteenth century sought, in unruffled calm, to mediate on Man and the broad generic principles of his action. The nineteenth century shattered this artificial 'dome of many-colored glass' into innumerable fragments, each fragment an epitome of human kind; and desired to know the wants, the passions, and even the frailties of each individual. If we glance at the most characteristic names of the nineteenth century,-- Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Carlyle, Thackeray, Tennyson, Rossetti, Ruskin, Stevenson, -- whom we will, -- they are all the names of men who have written, with more or less tactful show of reticence, mainly about themselves, who have judged mankind by samples of brains and blood, who have made self-study and self-revelation the starting-points of all their adventures in the edification and entertainment of mankind. And in this sense Robert Browning, it may be, sums up the century and is its most characteristic exponent, since he, more consistently than anyone else, has repeated the thoughts and emotions of us all, only with those splendid modifications which are the ornament of genius." (1)

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(1) "The 19th Century--A Review of Progress"; article entitled "English Literature in the Nineteenth Century" by Edmund Gosse, page 218

Humanitarianism of Romanticism

Just as individualism and subjectivity found no adequate outlet in the drama, neither could the new humanitarianism of the Romantic Movement find a mouthpiece on the stage of the day. The Romantic poets, to be sure, sang of a new and thrilling understanding of the dignity of the individual, no matter how lowly. Robert Burns and Wordsworth sang of the essential nobleness of the common man, of the dignity and importance of his selfhood, of his rights as a free soul, but this feeling was not reflected upon the stage. The drama always mirrors the mind of the people, and, as yet, the new liberalism was not felt by the great mass of society but by the poets, economists, reformers, philosophers, and ultra-liberalists. In other words, it was the battle cry of the intelligentsia and not of the masses.

The philosophy born of Romanticism is much more apparent in the drama of today than it is in the drama of the nineteenth century. Modern drama is resonant with kindly human values, with the author's desire to see justice done to the poor and oppressed, and with the desire to extend a fraternal hand to all the derelicts of the earth. Now, rather than in the throes of the Romantic Movement, do we see the playwright the champion of the inadequate, the incompetent, the oppressed, the weak, and the delinquent. This is the note that sounds in the fraternalism of

Kennedy's "Servant in the House," in the psychological study of Yank in O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape," in the arraignment of society in Somerset Maughan's "Rain." Belasco, our great American realist, takes as his leading characters in his "Girl of the Golden West" a road agent and a bar maid; O'Neill takes a negro porter and a trans-Atlantic stoker from the East side of New York; Hauptmann, in the "Assumption of Hannele," a little peasant girl. The Irish school have glorified simple, primitive, peasant life in many of their plays. It is this same note which gives meaning to Hauptmann's "The Weavers" and to Galsworthy's "Justice," different as they are one from the other. It stands for a tolerant even loving comprehension of the other fellow's problems. It stands, too, for a faith in democracy, and a hope to see established on earth a social condition which will make democracy a fact and not merely a conventional, political catch-word.

The Romantic Movement affected philosophy, politics, economics, poetry, but its influence on the stage of its time was delayed. The seeds were planted then, but the harvest was to be enjoyed by another generation of men. Today, as we have seen, far more than at the opening of the nineteenth century, we have dramatists trying to show us the significance of the human soul, no matter how low, how sordid, or how stunted its material exterior. Today the common people, the oppressed and the lowly, have

taken their place as the leading characters on the stage. But not until the advent of Ibsen, who peopled his stage with middle-class men and women, do we have this new spirit beginning to make itself felt as a positive force in the theater. To be sure, Heywood, in the seventeenth century, in his "Woman Killed with Kindness," had given us domestic tragedy dealing with people that were far from royal blood. Lillo, in the eighteenth century, in his "London Merchant," had also given a popular domestic tragedy which might have stimulated imitation if the sentimental comedy had not just then seized the center of the stage and nullified any influence it might otherwise have had.

Renewed Interest in Elizabethan Drama

However, one aspect of the Romantic Movement did find its way into the drama, wielding a tremendous influence upon the stage of the period. Romanticism carried with it a renewed interest in the legendary, the mediaeval, the heroic, the wonderful, and the remote; and it was this phase of the movement to which the drama gave an immediate and powerful response. This tendency to mediaevalism found expression in a re-awakening of interest in the Elizabethan drama, especially in Shakespeare. Audiences once more listened with delight to Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher. Imitations of the Elizabethan diction,

as well as of the themes, were frequent and unabashed. Besides the few comedies which had always remained in the repertories of stock companies and the tragedy "Philaster," which was frequently acted at this time, the following Elizabethan plays were revived in the decade between 1778 and 1788: (1)

Bonduca, Fletcher (possibly with Field)
Bondman, Massinger
City Madam, "
Duke of Milan, Massinger
Knight of Malta, Fletcher and Massinger
A King and No King, Beaumont and Fletcher
Marcella
Maid of Honor, Massinger
The Picture, "
The Pilgrim, Fletcher
Scornful Lady, Beaumont and Fletcher
Triumph of Honor
Women Pleased, Fletcher

Effect of Popularity of Novel

Just at this time, the so-called "School of Terror" held the novel in its toils; and mediaeval stories, haunted castles, specters, ghosts, supernatural phenomena, and all the rest of the paraphernalia of horror filled the fiction of the day. In 1775, Robert Jephson published a play called "Braganza," which was welcomed warmly thus:

"His; no French tragedy, -- tame, polish'd, dull by rule!
Vigorous he comes, and warm from Shakespeare's school."

In 1781, Walpole's "Castle of Otranto" was dramatized and staged under the title "The Count of Narbonne." In the

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(1) Thorndike, Ashley: Tragedy

epilogue the author advertises his thrills in the following way:

"Midst the placid murmurings of Love
Rolls the rough tide of Gothick force along."

Most popular of all these Gothic tragedies of terror was Lewis's "Castle Spectre" produced in 1797. In the prologue Lewis describes the new romances ushered in by mediaevalism and terrorism in this fashion:

"Far from the haunts of men, of vice the foe,
The moon-struck child of genius and of woe,
Versed in each magic spell, and dear to fame,
She loathes the sun or blazing taper's light:
The moon-beamed landscape and tempestuous night
Alone she loves; and oft, with glimmering lamp,
Near graves new-opened, or midst dungeons damp,
Drear forests, ruin'd aisles, and haunted towers,
Forlorn she roves, and raves away the hours!
Anon, when storms howl loud and lash the deep,
Desperate she climbs the sea-rock's beetling steep;
There wildly strikes her harp's fantastic strings,
Tells to the moon how grief her bosom wrings,
And while her strange song chaunts fictitious ills,
In wounded hearts Oblivion's balm distils."

The novel, at this time, was providing the reading public with all the thrills and excitement that in the Elizabethan age had been supplied by the theater. This new form bid fair to usurp from the drama its ancient function of wrestling with the problems of human life. On the stage of the day, dramatized "tales of horror" were more popular than the legitimate drama itself. These interlopers from the field of the novel helped to widen the breach that was constantly and perceptibly opening between literature and the stage.

As the century progressed, the wide and increasing

popularity of the novel constantly strengthened the tendency away from poetry toward prose. In spite of the apparent activity of the theater, the inspiration of the Shakespearian revival, the superb histrionic ability of many great actors like Macready and actresses like the talented Miss Faucit, tragedy failed to produce anything which could compare with the best efforts of the novel, its literary rival. Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, and Reade all produced works which were a permanent addition to English literature. Where is there a tragedy in the Romantic Revival that will live as long as "Vanity Fair," "Silas Marner," or "David Copperfield"? Only when the drama adopted the subject matter and the medium of prose fiction did it become once more a popular form of entertainment and a rival of the novel.

The Influence of German Romanticism

The close of the eighteenth century and the opening of the nineteenth saw the drama in a state of transition which might have been favorable for the development of a new type if a powerful influence from Germany had not entered English drama just at this psychological moment. If it accomplished nothing more, the sentimental comedy and the realistic prose domestic tragedy of the eighteenth century had paved the way for a change from existing and long standing conventions. Tragedies in three acts, in prose, on domestic themes, drawing heroes from middle-

class society instead of from the purple, dealing with present life -- all this was experimental and, therefore, indicative of a changing taste. One would think that a desire for change would be the best possible soil in which to grow a new national type expressive of the age, but before this transitional spirit could be productive of good, the German influence entered the English theater expressing itself in two totally different ways. First came the new Romanticism brought into existence by the "Sturm and Drang" School of intellectuals and characterized by a deep appreciation of Shakespeare and a renewed interest in the Elizabethan drama. Diametrically opposite to this in spirit, came the craze for cheap, sensational melodrama that we associate with the name of Kotzebue.

"Sturm and Drang" School

The latter part of the eighteenth century in Germany saw the inspiration of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing bring fresh life to the "cribb'd and confined" drama. Many young dramatists under the leadership of Lessing were eager to free the German theater from the formal rules and traditions insisted upon by Voltaire and the French pseudo-classicists. Coming as it did at this critical period in German literature, Lessing's influence was of supreme importance. In his "Hamburgische Dramaturgie" (1767-68) he attacked the French theories of tragedy, and dealt a

death blow to the despotic rule of Voltaire and the Leipzig School of German neo-classicism. His fervent admiration for Shakespeare was unbounded. He supported the principles laid down by Aristotle and attempted to show how they had been misquoted and misrepresented by the French classicists. He points out that the unities of time and place were not always observed by the best Greek dramatists, while he establishes his own doctrines on the authority of Aristotle and on examples taken from the Greek dramatists, and from Shakespeare and Calderon. He especially denounces imitations of French models. The best writers in the French theater might have attained the highest honors in tragedy, he says, if they had not regarded them as already attained. The French, with their Aristotelian perversions, he shows, would have excluded Shakespeare from the ranks of the great dramatists of the world. He tried to show that drama should be a sincere and true representation of life; that tragedy should proceed from sympathetic character studies, and not from accidental horrors introduced to give novelty and surprise. Incorporating his ideas, and giving specific form to his theories, the "Sturm and Drang School" pointed the way back to Shakespeare. The great Elizabethan master became the idol of the young German dramatists, and an enthusiastic era of Shakespearian study and imitation was begun.

Melodrama of Kotzebue

Diametrically opposed to the healthy, constructive reaction against classicism inaugurated by Lessing and Schiller, we have the baneful influence of August Frederick Kotzebue, who was content to encumber the stage with the cheap, melodramatic clap-trap of the day with its propensity for the bizarre, the sensational, and the sentimental. He wrote, in all, about two hundred plays which took Europe and America by storm.

"Kotzebue was a thoroughly practical man, and wrote for the market. Schiller had tried to make a school of the theater; but Kotzebue viewed it as a shop in which he could carry on an extensive trade. . . . If Kotzebue's dramas had been written to make Schiller's theory of 'an educational theater' appear ridiculous, it could not have been done more effectively. Critics wrote severely of such plays as 'Brother Moriz'; but the unscrupulous author had an applauding public on his side. He had good tact in making arrangements for stage-effects -- especially in farces and comedies -- and some of his tragedies are highly sensational . . .

"It is not intended to be said that Kotzebue, who ruled so long in the theater, gained and maintained his popularity merely by pandering to the depraved taste of the public. Pieces that kept their reputation for twenty years and more must have some merits, such as lively action, a fertile invention of effective situations, and some rather clever portraitures of the lower characteristics of men and women . . .

"Kotzebue was profoundly irreverent, and had not the slightest suspicion that he was in any respect inferior to Goethe, whom he seems to have viewed as an intruder in Weimar. On one occasion, the playwright made arrangements for a showy coronation of Schiller as poet-laureate, which was to take place in the town-hall at Weimar; but the sole object of the scheme was to give annoyance to Goethe. It, however, gave greater annoyance to Schiller, who declared that the bare suggestion had injured his health. Kotzebue respected nobody. One of his farces ('The Visit') was intended to make the philosopher Kant appear ridiculous;

another was directed against Fichte; 'The Incognito' was a satire on the brothers Schlegel, and another farce, called 'The Hyperborean Ass', was written to expose the errors of the Romantic School, who had ventured to suggest that people ought not to be satisfied with such plays as were written by Kotzebue." (1)

Sheridan, although he had previously satirized sentimentality, translated Kotzebue's "Die Spanier in Peru," bringing it out at Drury Lane under the title "Pizzaro." This adaptation was such a huge success that he produced immediately another of Kotzebue's plays called "Menschenhass und Reue" under the English title "The Stranger." Kotzebue's great success was due to his remarkable skill in stagecraft, and to his ability to pander to the sensational taste of his day. The Kotzebue melodrama aptly Bertillionizes the low standard of public taste which was then vitiating the theater. He is a product of his times; clever and shrewd enough to utilize for dramatic material the conventions, as well as the sentiments, of the hour. He contributed nothing to the development of the drama, and is of no significance whatsoever in the forward march of English tragedy.

Interest of German "New Romantics" in Shakespeare

Following in the footsteps of Lessing, came Goethe and Schiller, two men who contributed immeasurably to the

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(1) Gostwick and Harrison: Outlines of German Literature; pages 361-363

interest awakened in Shakespeare, and to the development of the so-called "New-Romantic" school. In the struggle going on between the French classicists, upon the one hand, and the Shakespearian romantic school, on the other, they threw the weight of their genius toward the side of dramatic freedom. Such plays as "Faust" and "Wilhelm Tell" are not only splendid drama but beautiful poetry as well and carry the names of their authors to a high place in dramatic literature. It is significant and interesting to note that, in Germany, tragedy preserved its conventional form. But Goethe and Schiller were not merely great poets; they were men of the theater, as well.

Just as Goethe and Schiller carried on the work of Lessing, and stimulated and strengthened the interest in Shakespeare, so the Schlegels, both August and Karl, received the torch from their falling hands. Their translations of Shakespeare are monumental works in the history of German romanticism. A host of dramatic criticism on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan drama arose, and Shakespearian scholars were legion. A great deal of German romantic criticism found its way into England, and served as a stimulus to the era of dramatic criticism flourishing there during the early years of the nineteenth century. In 1798, Coleridge, in company with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, visited Germany, and during his ten months' stay there he became thoroughly proficient

in the language, literature, and genius of the German people. He was particularly influenced by Lessing, in dramatic criticism, and by Kant in metaphysics. Thoroughly imbued with Lessing's romantic principles and especially by his enthusiastic praise of Shakespeare, Coleridge returned to disseminate German thought throughout the intellectual circles of England. One of the direct results of his continental tour was his admirable translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein," a work in which the poetry of the translation is, in some cases, far better than the poetry of the original.

English Dramatic Criticism

It is said that Coleridge went to Germany a poet and returned a philosopher. If English poetry is the poorer for this, at least English criticism gained a keener analytic mind and a penetrative philosopher than Coleridge might otherwise have become. In his "Lectures on Shakespeare," he quickened the interest already awakened in the plays of Shakespeare and helped immeasurably to spread the influence of German romanticism in England, as well as to prepare the way for the rise of the transcendental movement, headed by Carlyle in England and by Emerson in America. English drama is indebted to Coleridge for revolutionizing the view of Shakespeare held by the classicists. He showed that his work was not

the product of the wild, irregular genius of a pure child of nature, but of a poetic wisdom which was as remarkable for its disclosure of judgment as for its manifestation of genius. To him, Shakespeare was not an artist who "warbled his native wood notes wild." Coleridge contributed two original poetic tragedies to the Romantic Revival, "Remorse" and "Zapolya." Neither one is a great play, nor can either compare in poetical beauty with the "Ancient Mariner," and yet they both achieved some success on the stage, and were as good, perhaps, as any of the poetical output of the day.

The inspiration that Coleridge found in Schiller, Carlyle found in Goethe. In Goethe, Carlyle saw the greatest poet and thinker of the age, a man who was able to probe the intricacies of modern life and to read its hidden secrets, a man with a breadth of thought, a sense of humanity, and a wealth of wisdom. To Carlyle, Goethe, above all the poets and thinkers of his age, could see life steadily and see it whole. He was not so much a poet, or a dramatist, as a teacher. We have, then, Coleridge and Carlyle emphasizing the Aristotelian idea of drama as a means to greater morality, to higher ideals, to loftier emotions, and to a more perfect understanding of the meaning of existence. "Tragedy," said Coleridge, "raises the emotions, the fears, and the hopes, which convince the inmost heart that their final cause is not to be discov-

ered in the limits of mere mortal life, and force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which those struggles of inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved . . . In tragedy, the moral law, either as obeyed or violated, above all consequences -- its own maintenance or violation constituting the most important of all consequences -- forms the ground." (1)

Like Coleridge, Charles Lamb did a great deal to stimulate interest in the glorious heritage of drama which Englishmen had received from the past. In fact, Lamb's first noteworthy work was his "Tales from Shakespeare" written in conjunction with his sister Mary. This Shakespearian study was soon followed by "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets" which covered the whole field of Elizabethan drama outside of Shakespeare. This study proved most influential in turning the attention of his world to Shakespeare's contemporaries as well as to the great master himself. Lamb not only had a rare enthusiasm for old drama, but he possessed, also, the happy faculty of communicating his enthusiasm to others.

We find, then, in England as in Germany admiration for Shakespeare's genius the chief source of dramatic inspiration among the intelligentsia. The dramatic critics

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(1) Coleridge: Literary Remains; vol.II

may not have created this interest but they certainly helped immeasurably to spread it. While the commercial theater was descending to its lowest and most decadent state, we find writing in England some of the greatest dramatic critics that English literature knows. It would be impossible to give here any adequate notion of the grasp of thought, the wide and intensive reading of Elizabethan drama found in the critical literature of this age.

The following list of some of the men influencing the thought of the day will, perhaps, give an idea of the literary circle from which this body of criticism came and of its general tenor.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Lectures on Shakespeare
- The Drama Generally and Public Taste, 1818
- Progress of the Drama, 1818
- Greek Drama, 1818

Charles Lamb
- Tales from Shakespeare
- Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, 1808
- On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century, 1823
- On Some of the Old Actors
- Stage Illusion
- Various Other of the Elia Essays

William Hazlitt
- On Modern Comedy, 1815
- Schlegel on the Drama, 1816
- A View of the English Stage, 1818
- On Wit and Humor, 1819
- On the Comic Writers of the Last Century, 1819
- On Dramatic Poetry, 1820
- Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, 1820

Leigh Hunt
Critical Essays, 1807
Contributions to periodicals, such as "The Reflector", "The Indicator", "The Companion", etc.

Robert Southey
The Doctor (contains articles on Drama and dramatists.)

Walter Scott
Drama, 1810

Percy Bysshe Shelley
Defence of Poetry (contains passages on drama), 1821

Sheridan Knowles
Lectures on Dramatic Literature, 1820-1850

Walter Savage Landor
Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare, 1834

Thomas De Quincey
On the Knocking at the Gate in "Macbeth"

In all of these critics we find a superb disregard for the eighteenth century "rules" so elaborately formulated by neo-classicism both in England and in France. They gave an entirely new direction to English Shakespearian criticism; no longer do we have the master Elizabethan dramatist patronized as a "diamond in the rough"; no longer are his passion, imagination, and emotion held in suspicion. On the contrary, these romantic critics, to the last man of them, denounce the dogmatic character of pseudo-classic criticism, especially of the French brand, and urge a restoration of the theater as a national institution as it had been in the days of the Elizabethans. Viewing with

alarm and disgust the decadent dramatic forms pandering to the popular taste, they urged the union of old and true forms of dramatic art with the thought of their day. But in all this apparently negative work, their purpose was not destructive. They were trying to build up while they were pulling down. Their chief service to the theater was that they attracted the attention of the intelligentsia to the surpassing genius of Shakespeare, and while denouncing slavish imitation, demanded a profound respect for the great Elizabethans. In a word they gave to literature an inspiring idea which, as we shall see later, the dramatic poets of the day tried to realize.

This body of dramatic criticism is all the more remarkable when we consider that it was written in defiance of a popular taste which reveled in the importations of Kotzebue, Iffland, to say nothing of the deplorable "robber-romances" of the time modeled on the "Rinaldo Rinaldini" of Vulpius and on other bizarre tales written both in England and in Germany. Through the pages of the critical magazines which the nineteenth century ushered into literature, the ideas of the dramatic critics were disseminated through the literary world. By the opening of the nineteenth century, too, every newspaper of any significance had its theatrical section which exercised an influence in proportion to the power of its staff critic.

French Reaction against Neo-Classicism

The reaction against the tyranny of neo-classicism so vehement among the romanticists of Germany was not slow to spread from one country to another. In France three types of drama soon appeared to replace the pseudo-classic Voltairean play:

1. Melodrama
2. The romantic play
3. The social drama

However, it was not until Victor Hugo's "Hernani" that we have a definite and final break with the classical traditions of Voltaire, and a new theory of drama launched into the French theater.

"Although it was Dumas who lit the torch, yet it was Hugo whose magnificent windmills fanned the romantic blaze into a conflagration . . . In Hugo's opinion the unities of time and place were non-essential, action was of supreme importance, the style though poetic should be 'natural', and the couplets which had so long been embedded in tragic verse should be discarded. The grotesque should be mingled with the terrible, as was illustrated in the comedy of the Greeks, in Dante, and in Shakespeare, Molière, and Goethe . . . In 1830, with the production of 'Hernani,' Hugo's creed was trumpeted to the world. . . The first night of 'Hernani', February 25, 1830, was one of the most notable performances in the history of the stage." (1)

Melodrama appeared in Paris as early as the close of the eighteenth century. Rousseau had applied the term to his "Pygmalion," a totally different type of work. Melodrama is a blanket term used to include many types having but very little in common one with the other.

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(1) Bellinger, Martha Fletcher: A Short History of the Drama

"Strictly it belongs to a peculiar distillation of physical and emotional thrills with a villain-heroine conflict, a musical accompaniment and a happy ending. . In the scabrous environs of the Boulevard du Temple, in the company of rope-walkers and mountebanks, quadrupeds and clowns, it came by attributes that have damned and distinguished it all its days: its charlatanry and opportunism, its hardihood and catholicity, its vulgarity and naïveté -- not to speak of its incorrigible thieving propensities. There, too, it acquired its inflexible moral certitude, its mood of robust optimism, and certain Rousseauistic levelling tendencies widely current in that era of passionate Republicanism.

"The Boulevard du Temple was a precise laboratory where shows were weighed by the single, inexorable standard of box office. Tradition and artistic ordinance counted for nothing in this mart, where the canaille of Paris took its pleasure, rubbing shoulders with an occasional slumming party from Versailles. The typical audience was a swarming, promiscuous, Hogarthian mob, turbulent, illiterate and unwashed; under the applause or jeers of such, melodrama crystallized into a play of strong language and violent emotion, heavily loaded with smashing climax, a concoction in which emphasis was upon plot and incident, with suspense diligently cultivated and dumb show and spectacle liberally employed in the presentation. Its stock figures, which Brander Matthews has happily described as 'drawn in profile and violently stencilled in the primary colors,' were the pure persecuted maiden, the despicable 'traitre' bent upon her undoing, the intrepid, irreproachable hero, and the 'comic', usually disreputable but always on the side of the angels. These characters became fixed conventions with Pixerécourt, the Moses of the genre, to whose influence is due the adoption of the three-act form, a departure from the prevailing five acts of tragedy and comedy.

"Melodrama was eclectic, taking its ingredients where it found them: 'coups de théâtre' which a decadent tragedy had borrowed from Spanish drama, the misfortunes of 'comédie larmoyante,' the buffoonery indigenous to the Boulevard, horrors made in Germany, and the musical and tersichorean divertissements of the théâtre de la Foire." (1)

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(1) Melodrama: Article by Frank Rahill; Theatre Arts Monthly, April 1932

Notable Decline in Aesthetic Appreciation

It did not take long for French melodrama to cross the channel and enter into the English theater. There it joined forces with the German melodrama already rampant, and with the frenzied tales seeping in from the School of Terror dominating the novel. In vain the literary world deplored the decadent theater of its day. The protest of the cultured few was unheeded by the masses. Wordsworth complains bitterly of the prevailing "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation." He says that

> "The violent excitement of public events, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies, has induced a torpor of mind which only yields to gross and sensational effects -- such effects as are produced by 'frantic novels', of the Radcliffe or Monk Lewis type, full of mysterious criminals, gloomy castles, and terrifying spectres." (1)

Byron, contemplating the melodrama surging into the English theater from Germany and France, exclaimed:

> "Who but must mourn, while these are all the rage,
> The degradation of our vaunted stage."

A decade later, in 1829, Carlyle also wrote:

> "Nay, do not we English hear daily, for the last twenty years, that the drama is dead, or in a state of suspended animation; and are not medical men sitting on the case, and propounding their remedial appliances, weekly, monthly, quarterly, to no manner of purpose?" (2)

Such outbursts only emphasize the deplorable estrangement between literature and the stage existing in that day.

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(1) Dickinson, Thomas H.: The Contemporary Drama of England

(2) Brandes, George M.C.: Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature

We must not think of melodrama as being foisted upon an unwilling populace. If the public did not crave this type of entertainment, it would not have bothered to fill the theaters where it was shown. Drama is the most democratic of all arts, since its very existence depends upon the favor of the people. It is, therefore, likely at all times to represent the average intelligence of the age in which it is written. Naturally, when the theater reverted from the cultured few to the uncultured many, the general standard of taste was perceptibly lowered, and managers have always sacrificed artistic integrity to a commercial success.

Revival of Poetic Drama in England

To the cause of the poetic drama rallied about every man of letters of the day in England. Although they had no connection with the theater, and despaired of its reform, they undertook to write plays in verse. The ease with which blank verse may be written by anyone possessing even mediocre poetic ability induces many men to think that they are writing poetry when they are only writing a measured sort of prose.

> "Too popular is tragic poesy,
> Straining his tiptoes for a farthing fee
> And doth beside on rimeless members tread.
> Unbid iambics flow from careless head." (1)

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(1) Symonds, J.A. : Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama

However, we cannot give the mediocrity of the authors as a reason for the failure of the poetic drama, for, not only did the mediocre pens turn to the poetic drama, but so did the best creative genius that the age could boast.

In the Georgian period we find the following writers attempting to revive the poetic drama:

1. Baillie, Joanna. (1762-1851)
   a. Plays on the Passions
      1798
         Basil. Tragedy on Love
         Trial. Comedy on Love
         De Monfort. Tragedy on Hatred. (Staged by Kemble and Mrs. Siddons and, later, by Kean.)
      1802
         Election. Comedy on Hatred. (Produced with music at Eng. Opera House)
         Ethwald. Tragedy on Ambition. (Two Parts)
         Second Marriage. Comedy on Ambition
      1812
         Orra. Tragedy on Fear
         Dream. Tragedy on Fear
         Siege. Comedy on Fear
         Beacon. Musical Drama on Hope
      1836
         Romiero. Tragedy on Jealousy
         Alienated Manor. Comedy on Jealousy
         Henriquez. Tragedy on Remorse. (Produced at Drury Lane)
   b. Miscellaneous Plays
      1804
         Rayner. Tragedy
         Country Inn. Comedy
         Constantine Paleologus; or, The Last of the Caesars. (Prod. at Edin. and at Drury Lane.)
      1810
         Family Legend. Tragedy. (Prod. in Edin. and at Drury Lane.)
      1826
         Martyr. Drama

1836
Separation. Tragedy. (Prod. at Cov. Gard.)
Stripling. Tragedy
Phantom. Musical Drama
Enthusiasm. Comedy
Witchcraft. Tragedy
Homicide. Tragedy
Bride. Drama
Match. Comedy

2. Beddoes, Thomas Lovell. (1803-1849)
Bride's Tragedy. 1822
Death's Jest Book; or, The Fool's Tragedy. 1850
(Writing begun in 1825)

3. Byron, George Gordon. (1788-1824)
Manfred. Dramatic Poem. 1817
Marino Faliero. 1820 (Prod. at Drury Lane.)
Sardanapalus. 1821
Two Foscari. 1821
Cain. Mystery. 1821
Werner. 1822
Heaven and Earth. Mystery. 1823
Deformed Transformed. 1824

4. Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. (1772-1834)
Fall of Robespierre. 1794. (First act by Coleridge,) second and third by Southey.)
Remorse. 1813. (Prod. at Drury Lane.)
Zapolya. 1817
Osorio. 1873 (Written 1797)
<u>Dramatic Translations</u>
Schiller's Piccolomini. 1800
" Death of Wallenstein. 1800

5. Keats, John. (1795-1821)
Otho the Great. 1819 (With Charles Armitage Brown.)
King Stephen. 1819 (Unfinished)

6. Lamb, Charles. (1775-1834)
John Woodvil. 1802.
Mr. H---. 1806
(Pawnbroker's Daughter)

7. Mitford, Mary Russell. (1787-1856.)
Julian. 1823 (Prod. by Macready at Cov. Gard.)
Foscari. 1826 (" at Cov. Gard.)
Rienzi. 1828 (" " Drury Lane.)
Charles I. 1834 (Prod. at Victorian Theater.)

8. Shelley, Percy Bysshe. (1792-1822)
   Prometheus Unbound. 1820
   Cenci. 1820
   Oedipus Tyrannus. 1820
   Hellas. 1822
   Dramatic Fragments
      Charles the First
      Of an Unfinished Drama
   Dramatic Translations
      Cyclops of Euripides
      From Calderon's Magico Prodigioso
      From Goethe's Faust

9. Wordsworth, William. (1770-1850)
   Borderers. 1842 (Written 1795-1796)

The nineteenth century, in both the Georgian and Victorian periods, has all too many names which have been written upon the sands of time and now have completely disappeared. In every century, there are many men who drop from the lime light into comparative obscurity because they do not possess a permanence of appeal, but they are still there on the pages of literary histories for the student. The nineteenth century, however, is unique in having so many names that have been swallowed up, completely and entirely, by oblivion. Immensely overrated in their own day, their popularity was short and their eclipse complete. Names like Procter and Darley today recall no associations yet, in the early nineteenth century, they were Elizabethan disciples whose poetic dramas were viewed by the critics with admiration. Very few people today have ever read the works of Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), a dramatist most characteristic of

the failure of the poet-romanticists of the nineteenth century. In the midst of the melodramatic maelstrom about her, Miss Baillie made a heroic but futile attempt to revive the poetic drama, modeled upon the Shakespearian play, and involving a study of human passion. In her preface to the "Plays on the Passions" she says that she has attempted to satisfy "the universal desire in the human mind to behold man in every situation, putting forth his strength against the currents of adversity, scorning all bodily anguish, or struggling with those feelings of nature which, like a boiling stream, will often burst through the barriers of pride."

Rarely has anyone been more praised by those whose praise is worth having. From the time of her first appearance as a dramatic writer the most representative critics expressed unqualified admiration for her work. By Scott she was called "the bold enchantress who had awakened the inspired strain of Shakespeare." Her plays were extolled as exhibiting the development of the pure dramatic faculty "with the least possible aid from external influences." But while her plays were warmly praised by critics, they met with comparatively little success upon the stage. Yet, powerful influences had been enlisted several times to make them succeed. In 1800, the Kembles brought out "De Montfort" at Drury Lane. The aristocracy lent the performance its fullest support. Mrs. Siddons

took the principal feminine role, a fact in itself conducive to success. Yet, with all this help bolstering the play, it was with difficulty prolonged to a run of eleven nights. In spite of an occasional success, most of Miss Baillie's plays met with the same fate when put to the acid test of production. As we look back upon them, we wonder how any of them ever got as far as the actual theater. They are suitable only for the closet. Unfortunately, for their permanency, her plays have succeeded no better with the reading public than they did with the playgoers, of the nineteenth century. They had a respectable sale during her life time, but now they are forgotten. It is almost incredible that in the January and February numbers of Blackwood in 1836 we find repeated eulogies of the excellence of Miss Baillie's dramas, and the amazing avowal that Scott was justified in linking her name with Shakespeare's.

One of the strangest figures in English literature is Thomas Lovell Beddoes, 1803-1849, the "brightest ornament" of the ultra-romantic school. Deeply steeped in melancholy, so world weary that he died a suicide, self-exiled from his native England, he gave impetus to the nineteenth century stream of romanticism. By a strange fate, the masterpiece of his genius, "Death's Jest Book," was not given to the world until after his death. However, as none of his dramatic pieces ever reached the theater,

he is outside of our present study. Beddoes is of interest to us because of the note of warning which he sent out to those dramatists who were attempting to re-create an Elizabethan poetic drama in the nineteenth century theater. Although an imitator of the Elizabethans, and of Webster in particular, Beddoes clearly saw the dangers in which such an imitation would result. He says:

> "The man who is to awaken the drama must be a bold trampling fellow -- no creeper into worm-holes -- no reviver even, however good. These reanimations are vampire cold. Such ghosts as Marlowe, Webster, etc., are better dramatists, better poets, I dare say, than any contemporary of ours, but they are ghosts -- the worm is in their pages -- and we want to see something that our grandsires did not know . . . Just now the drama is a haunted ruin." (1)

Here he diagnosed his own failure and those of his fellow disciples. It is odd that this truth should come from the one man of the century who was most truly Elizabethan in nature and genius.

An interesting concomitance of the critical movement which was an adjunct of the Romantic Revival was the interest displayed in prosody. German romanticists found in the musical aspect of poetry a fascinating study, and worked out intricate and elaborate comparison of vowel sounds with musical tones and color values. Henry Lanz in his study entitled "The Physical Basis of Rime" says:

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(1) Thorndike: Tragedy

"The Romantic School with its cult of emotions was inclined to emphasize the musical aspect of language. It is not the logic but the music of words that speaks to our soul in poetry and reveals to us the greatest secrets of artistic intuition. In his 'Lehrlingen zu Sais,' Novalis (1772-1801) tells his dream of an ideal language that has the magic power of song to penetrate into the inner depths of nature, and decompose its every entity. Its words are keys to the souls of things, its vibrations the echoes of the world's mysteries. The sound itself apart from its conventional meaning appears now as a sign. Not merely words but separate syllables and individual letters acquire now a symbolic value. A.W.Schlegel (1767-1845) invents a whole scale of colors corresponding to human vowels, and he attributes a special significance to every particular conjunction of the vowel-color. A represents the light, clear red (das rote licht-helle A), and signifies Youth, Friendship, and Radiance. I stands for celestial blue, symbolizing Love and Sincerity. O is purple; U stands for violet, and OO is adorned in navy blue. This subjective vowel-symbolic was at the time very popular among the Romanticists and the Symbolists. Much eloquence was wasted on the question whether A is really red or yellow. Gaspar Poggel at a latter date resumes the argument, and even the scholarly Grimm lends it a certain amount of favorable consideration. However arbitrary and subjective, this vowel-mysticism is an important element in the Romantic theory of rime and poetry . . . . The musical factor in poetry was never analyzed with more profound consideration, the intellectual interest for it never elsewhere attained such intensity and earnestness, as among the representatives of the Romantic movement. A.W.Schlegel, following the path of the Elizabethan prosodists, proclaims that 'poetry is music for the inner ear.'"(1)

Rhythm is a very sensitive thing. In a supremely great poetical dramatist the rational content of the words is reflected in the rhythmic structure of the verse. It is an objective proof of the greatness of the poet that his rhythmic form and rational content constitute a union. Shakespeare's poetry is indissolubly fused with

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(1) Lanz, Henry: The Physical Basis of Rime

his meaning. The music of his verse is the music of his meaning; the two are one. We very seldom paraphrase Shakespeare; to recall the thought is to recall the very words in which the thought was couched. No one ever says, for example, that mercy is one of the infinite attributes of an infinite and perfect God, as free to man as redemption. No, we say:

> "The quality of mercy is not strained
> It droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. . ."

Here the poetry does not beautify the meaning; we have an identity of form and content. It seems impossible to give the thought of a passage in any other form but its poetic original, because the mysterious thing that we recognize as fusion has taken place.

In this passage from "The Midsummer Night's Dream" Shakespeare makes us hear the "sea-maid's music" in the sheer beauty of the words that he chooses.

> "OBERON. Thou remember'st
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
> To hear the sea-maid's music.
> PUCK. I remember.
> OBERON. That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid all arm'd. A certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal throned by the west,
> And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon
> And the imperial votaress passed on,

In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell;
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness." (1)

The alliteration of the consonants "r" and "m" and "s" gives a peculiarly musical effect to the verse. Assonance here produces a sense of melody that is very pleasing. The vowel "o" occurs forty-four times in this passage; the "ur" sound introduces a musical tone as in "heard", "mermaid", "uttering", "certain", "earth", "remember", "fiery", "western", "purple"; the vowel melody of the "o" and "e" is most pronounced, also. Shakespeare knew well the power of words to stir the emotions. He plans for the melody of the uttered words, never forgetting that he wrote for an audience whose ears were sensitive even to the brief melodies produced by vowel sounds. Lanz says:

"Words affect us emotionally in four different ways: by what they mean; by what they convey through association; by sound; and by rhythm. The first two, meaning and association, are generally considered the most important ones. Transmission of meaning is, of course, the chief function of words. Yet there are emotional concomitants connected even with the most abstract ideas. Every logical form throws its shadow into the land of emotions. It is these shadows that make our driest abstractions appear beautiful . . . In order to appeal to us intellectually, he (the poet) must have something to say. In order to touch us emotionally, he must have some emotional experience before he sets to work. But there are other kinds of emotions -- those properly called poetical -- which are attached organically to the expressions themselves and do notexist apart from them. The poet cannot cultivate those emotions in his heart prior to their expression, because they are properly an attribute of expression and do not exist apart from it.

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(1) Shakespeare: The Midsummer Night's Dream; Act II, Sc.1

"The emotional contents derived from meaning and association are not sufficient to describe all emotional contents associated with human speech. There are emotions which are caused only by words, as physical sounds, without any reference to either meaning or associations. 'It is true,' says Santayana, 'that language is a symbol for intelligence rather than a stimulus to sense, and accordingly the beauties of discourse which commonly attract attention are merely the beauties of the objects and ideas signified; yet the symbols have a sensible reality of their own, a euphony which appeals to our senses if we keep them open.' Words, just like tones and colors, also have their emotional physiognomies; their acoustic personalities are varied. With every uttered phrase are connected, not merely those emotions which are produced by association and remembered from our previous experience but also those subtle and transient emotional fragments which are connected with the sound, rhythm, and physiognomy of words:

> Reason has moons, but moons not hers
> Lie mirrored on her sea,
> Confounding her astronomers.

Every verse, every phrase, has such satellites of a-logical formation which revolve around the meaning and the sound of words. In our everyday conversation, where meaning stays in the foreground, those emotional satellites are ordinarily small and too far removed from the center of attention to be noticed. 'The words of most men kiss with satiated familiarity,' says the poet in Bodenheim's 'Impulsive Dialogue.' In poetical language they are, on the contrary, deliberately cultivated. Poetry, according to Santayana, is the speech in which the instrument counts as well as the meaning. 'So, while the purest prose is a mere vehicle of thought, verse, like stained glass, arrests attention in its own intricacies, confuses it in its own glories, and is even at times allowed to darken and puzzle in the hope of casting over us a supernatural spell.' " (1)

The emphasis that the romanticists put upon the music inherent in our English words should have been conducive in their playwriting to melodious, euphonious blank verse. Elizabethan dramatists, however, were far

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(1) Lanz, Henry: The Physical Basis of Rime

more mellifluous than their nineteenth century imitators, whose intricate studies in prosody seem to have contributed more to the modern school of poetic symbolism than to the effectiveness of their own histrionic blank verse. The marked decline in the capacity for aesthetic appreciation on the part of the nineteenth century audience offered little stimulus to the dramatic poet aspiring for popular favor. No longer did the splendor and majesty of sonorous blank verse exert a spell and create an emotional effect; no longer did the grandeur and sublimity of poetical thought transport and thrill an audience. The nineteenth century audience had traveled a long way from the old Greek audience that would hiss and deride an actor who mouthed his verse. In 1834 the "Edinburgh Review" (1) characterized the time as "a period of marked indifference to poetical productions." The same attitude was taken by all the monthly critical magazines. "Many a well-educated man," said Fraser's Magazine, "can no more read poetry than he can Chinese. The neglect, not to say contempt, of the muses, now in fashion, bids fair to render this Parnassian illiteracy universal." (2)

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(1) Edinburgh Review, October 1834

(2) Fraser's Magazine, December 1834

Summary

When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, the outlook for the poetical drama was far from promising. As we have seen, the Romantic Movement which leavened practically every form of creative thinking, did not contribute anything of special significance to the theater of its day with the sole exception of its revival of interest in the Elizabethan drama and in Shakespeare in particular. The subjective and individualistic character of romanticism was alien to the objectivity that must prevail in the drama.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the wide and increasing popularity of the novel constantly strengthened the tendency away from poetry toward prose. The melodramatic character of the "School of Terror," at that time dominating the novel, was transferred into the theater through dramatizations of these lurid tales, and this tendency toward the bizarre and the unreal was further strengthened by the influx of German and French melodrama.

A healthier contribution from Germany was the romantic reaction against French neo-classicism inaugurated by such men as Lessing and Schiller, and the ardent appreciation of Shakespeare exhibited by the German romanticists. This mediaeval tendency, we saw, was further stimulated by the English dramatic critics of the age who denounced the rigid, dogmatic "rules" of the neo-classic theater

and exalted the romantic poetic drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

With the production in 1830 of Victor Hugo's "Hernani," romanticism triumphed in France;and the French theater, freed from the restrictions imposed by classical tradition, entered into a particularly prolific era of playwriting. Translations of French popular successes debilitated the English stage, which sank into a decadence degraded by melodrama, translations, and imitation. From the intelligentsia came a cry of protest unheeded by the commercial theater. This marked decline in the capacity for aesthetic appreciation on the part of both the theatrical managers and theater-going public offered very little inspiration to the dramatic poet looking for success in the theater of his day. Most of the men who tried were partial successes like Coleridge or confined themselves like Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Byron to the realm of the unacted play. Thus the Victorian Era dawned upon a stage barren of inspiration and holding but little promise to the poets who hoped to make the romantic poetic drama once more a success in the theater.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE POETIC DRAMA IN THE VICTORIAN ERA

1837 - 1901

Theater Monopoly

At the beginning of the Victorian Era the most pressing problem in the English theater was the one of monopoly. For one hundred seventy-five years a bitter war had been waged between the unlicensed theaters on the one hand and the monopolies on the other. Since the days of Charles II, after the dark period of the Puritan interregnum, three theaters only were legally empowered to perform the legitimate drama -- the drama of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Congreve, Sheridan, and Goldsmith. Drury Lane and Covent Garden operated under a patent dating from 1662 and the Little Theater in the Haymarket existed under a renewable license, first granted in 1766 to Samuel Foote. These three theaters, known as majors, having a monopoly of legitimate plays, all the others, known as minors, were limited to concerts, farces, or plays having musical accompaniment.

The monopoly of the legitimate drama enjoyed there by the licensed 'theatres royal,' Drury Lane, Covent Garden and -- with certain limitations -- the Haymarket, confined the other or 'minor' houses to spectacle, ballet, pantomime, musical shows and the like in which dialogue was banned. These restrictions were highly unpopular, and independent managers systematically evaded them,

bootlegging everything from Shakespeare to the latest Parisian thriller through the simple expedient of a nominal musical accompaniment to the spoken word. 'Macbeth' became a 'ballet of action;' 'Othello' a burletta with five songs in every act! Melodrama fitted perfectly into this policy, and was enthusiastically adopted 'on the Surrey Side,' across Waterloo Bridge, the historic stronghold of the lesser dramatic breeds without the law." (1)

The patents had been given when London was a city of less than two hundred thousand inhabitants. In the nineteenth century London had grown to almost a million population. To accommodate this vast number of play-goers, the patent theaters were enlarged to such a great size that only spectacular productions could be presented in them.

In 1843 Parliament passed an act freeing the theaters but the salutary results of this liberty were not realized until a period of adjustment, and therefore of confusion, had been weathered. Dickinson says:

"Instead of a chaos of subterfuges there now followed the chaos of new-found liberty. Within two years after 1843 the companies of the two great theaters were scattered through the minor theaters. In suddenly liberating the theaters without giving any support to the better standards of the nation's drama the English Parliament showed the same disregard for dramatic art that had been shown in continuing the patents. Here was an opportunity permanently to establish the national theater as a guardian of tradition and a school of the art. No such thing was done. All the theaters were put upon the same plane, to fight the battle of life or death with such weapons as they had. Comedy and poetic drama were thrown into the arena with vaudevilles and burlesques. The only interest the crown retained in drama was in a continuance of a hampering control.

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(1) Rahill, Frank: Melodrama (Article in Theater Arts Monthly, April 1932)

Music halls were compelled still to live under the general classification of disorderly places. The censorship of the Lord Chamberlain was reaffirmed and strengthened. Some of the immediate results are indicated by a writer in the 'Quarterly Review' for January, 1872. 'Companies became of necessity broken up; actors who by time and practice might have been tutored into excellence, were ruined by being lifted into positions far beyond their powers; every player became a law to himself; the traditions of the art were lost, the discipline which distinguished the old theaters was broken down.'

". . . There followed for twenty years a period of stagnation in the theater. From the opening of the Princess's theater in 1841 until 1866 no new theater was built in London. Covent Garden theater was burned in 1856 and when rebuilt went over to opera. Macready retired in 1849. Only Phelps and Kean were successful in Shakespeare's plays, the latter by a strong application of pictorial elements.

". . . The low state of the theater was reflected in popular estimation. In 1832 a Parliamentary committee reported that it had found a considerable decline in the taste of the public for theatrical performances.' This low standard was representative of all classes. At the time that Macready was making his first venture at Covent Garden in classical tragedy Queen Victoria was supporting with her repeated attendance the zoological shows at Drury Lane. The attitude of artists, critics, and men of letters toward the theater was either repugnant or patronizing. Carlyle looked upon the stage as a thing of tricks, attempting to do by mechanical means what could only be done by poetic genius. Other writers surrendered their taste absolutely upon entering a playhouse. Ruskin could admire anything, even the 'Claudian' of W. G. Wills. Dickens' experiments in playwriting are notorious. The story is told of Thackeray that, going to the theater with Edward Fitzgerald, the latter was so bored that he wanted to go home, but Thackeray shouted, 'By God! Isn't that splendid.'" (1)

In such an atmosphere of adjustment as this is it small wonder that the romantic ideal was stifled?

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(1) Dickinson, T. H.: The Contemporary Drama of England

Influence of Macready upon Poetic Drama.

The year that Queen Victoria ascended the throne saw Macready rise to the position of manager at Covent Garden. In Macready, the poetical drama had one of its staunchest supporters, and to his histrionic genius, rather than to its own intrinsic worth, it owes a great part of the success that it obtained. The romantic drama seemed to owe what little success it had to extraneous factors such as the brilliant acting of men like Knowles, Macready, Kean, and Irving and to its affinity with some of the popular sensational elements of melodrama. It was Macready who inspired Browning, Talfourd, and Bulwer-Lytton to write for the stage. Sheridan Knowles created his own poetic vehicles.

These great actors, with the sure histrionic instinct which they possessed, saw in the romantic poetic play with a melodramatic cast an effective vehicle for their talent. Such plays as Bulwer's "Richelieu" furnished the actor with unique opportunities for displaying his genius. The spaciousness and color of the poetry became a lustrous setting for the richness and fervor of his interpretive art. By sheer histrionic virtuosity such men as Macready and Irving took the weak vehicles offered them and converted them into vehicles of magnificent theatrical effectiveness.

Piracy of French Melodrama.

During the Victorian Era the craze for sensational melodrama waxed steadily greater until it dominated London as it had Paris and, earlier, German theatrical centers. The bulk of inspiration now came from Parisian originals and the Kotzebue influence gave place to that of Pixerécourt. The "Collina" of Pixerécourt had been the source of "A Tale of Mystery," a London success; and the works of this prolific author, as well as those of many other French writers, were taken over into English bodily without even an acknowledgment. This piracy increased, rather than diminished, as the century progressed. In fact, many of the melodramas which delighted audiences both in England and America and which were presented as original productions were, in reality, nothing more than translations of French successes. All of the following plays are French importations which masqueraded on the London stage as native productions:

The Two Orphans
The Corsican Brothers
The Ticket of Leave Man
After Dark
The Streets of London
The Lyons Mail
Drink
The Bells

So we find by the Victorian Era the cobbling of melodramas becoming a trade in London. Such men as Planché, Fitzball, Reynolds, Buckstone, and the Dibdins reckoned

their productions by the hundred. Every theater in London had on its staff hack professional playwrights who could purloin on order and produce an adaptation on almost a day's notice.

Success of Boucicault's Melodrama.

It was, however, in the hands of Dion Boucicault that melodrama reached its highest peak on the English stage. The success of Boucicault's plays was a death-blow to the ideals to which Macready had given his life and his genius. Poetic revivals and poetic imitations of Elizabethan splendor could not possibly compete with pieces frankly designed for the delectation of the uncultivated masses.

Boucicault was one of the greatest showmen of all time. He was not a great literary artist, but he was a man of the theater. His productions were many and varied. His success both in England and in America was prodigious. The following plays were all popular favorites in their day:

The Knight of Arva (1848)
The Broken Vow (1851)
The Corsican Brothers (1851)
The Vampire (1852)
Genevieve; or, The Reign of Terror (1853)
Louis XI (1854)
The Relief of Lucknow (1858)
The Colleen Bawn (1864)
Arrah -na-Pogue (1864)
Led Astray (1873)
The Shaughraun (1874)

Decline of Romanticism and Rise of Realism.

However, by the 70's, in spite of Boucicault's success, romanticism, exemplified in its noblest form in the poetic romantic drama and in its decadent form in melodrama, began to decline. Its transports and its emotional fervors had consumed most of its energy, and it slowly sank toward an eclipse. Historical and legendary subjects were displaced by studies of contemporary manners, written in prose by men who possessed a talent for the swing of ordinary speech, and for a certain straightforward characterization. People were weary of watching a virtuoso's exhibit; the whole paraphernalia of romanticism began to sound tinnily -- in fact, it had become merely "production stuff." In many cases the poetic drama condescended to borrow, as we have seen, from melodrama the stock situations which were "sure-fire" for the public taste.

Lyrical outpourings began to be succeeded by keen observations of contemporary life, and in place of plumed heroes from the far off ages, we have beginning to appear the more realistic types of modern life. The expansive sonorous blank verse which couched the romantic motif was replaced by a concise prose more in conformity with the demands of contemporary taste. Realism is essentially prosaic, and hence the vehicle used by writers of comedy

molded on life was prose.

French Prose Social Drama.

From France there came into England the prose social drama to widen the breach already opened between poetry and the drama. As early as 1835 Scribe was admitted into the French Academy as a reqard for his prodigious success in the French theater. By the Victorian Era writing for the stage was beginning to be a profitable trade in France, and we have three men so expert in their knowledge of stage craft that they practically worked out a dramatic formula. Eugene Scribe's plays are excellent examples of this mechanical perfection. He skilfully put together exciting intrigues, brisk dialogue, and rapid action, and was so successful that his output numbers about four hundred plays, twenty being produced in one single year. For thirty years he supplied the French stage with works devoid of inspiration, but displaying inimitable skill in their mastery of the technique of the theater. Dumas fils once said: "The dramatist who knows man as did Balzac, and the theater as well as Scribe, would be the greatest that has ever lived." Unfortunately, neither in France nor in England, was such a man given to the poetical drama during the nineteenth century.

Alexander Dumas fils was another man who did much to prepare for the modern prose drama. In his plays, he replaced poetry with a prose style "exact, condensed, as clear and sharp as steel" -- "a style all muscles and nerves." He recognized the inability of the average audience to appreciate the aesthetic element in a play, and hence concentrated on theatrical effectiveness rather than literary merit. He says himself: "Carelessness, imperfections, and barbarisms are unperceived by the public, provided the form is clear, salient, vigorous, and sonorous."

The last and greatest of the trilogy is Sardou, whose master was Eugene Scribe. He was gifted with a real flair for the theater, and some of his comedies of manners fall little short of masterpieces. He knew, almost intuitively, how to shape every situation in order to obtain theatrical effectiveness. All three of these men, although they contributed nothing by way of a profound observation of life, did a great deal toward teaching the art of playmaking. They all possessed incomparable dexterity of composition; they all knew the theater for which they wrote.

So the French melodrama and the commercially successful "well-made" play find their way into England, and

we have the London stage flooded with translations. Naturally, this furor for translations contributed to the sterility of the English drama, and the English stage entered into a particularly barren period.

"As Romanticism glorified the bandit and the outlaw, so the well-made play glorified the harlot and the domestic triangle of husband, wife, and lover; and it in turn became as mechanical in structure and as hackneyed in its stock figures as the more humble Punch-and-Judy shows. Such a play as 'Les pattes demouch' or La dame aux camelias,' interesting enough for a season or two, left much to be desired as models for a score of writers in half a dozen differenct countries: for, as patterns, they produced nothing but a succession of neat, crackling society plays with sex and the domestic triangle nauseatingly present." (1)

However, these "neat, crackling society plays" performed their own special part in aiding the trend of the age away from poetry toward prose -- away from romanticism toward realism.

Realism of Robertson.

In the mature work of Thomas William Robertson, best exemplified by his "Caste" produced in 1867, we have this tendency toward realism and contemporary life foreshadowed in England. William Archer says of Robertson:

"What he did was to substitute everyday reality (and often triviality) of speech for artificial rhetoric and 'wit'; to realize the dramatic value of 'touches of things common'; and to apply his intimate knowledge of the stage to the hitherto neglected task of faithfully reproducing the external aspects of modern life."

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(1) Bellinger: Short History of the Drama

Robertson was the son of an actor and an actor himself. His wife was an actress. Clearly he was a man of the theater and knew well his audience of his day. Like many of the playwrights who wrote for the commercial theater, he began by making translations from the French, but in 1864 he swung into his own full creative power. The following four plays represent his best work:

David Garrick,	1864
Society,	1865
Ours,	1866
Caste,	1867

Robertson carried realism beyond the actual drama into the very stage setting. He was the originator of the type of detailed realistic staging that David Belasco was to exploit later. The picture-frame stage and the smaller playhouse were the inevitable consequences of realism in the theater.

George Bernard Shaw answers his own query: "Where is there a touch of nature in Caste?"

"In the windows, in the doors, in the walls, in the carpet, in the ceiling, in the kettle, in the fireplace, in the ham, in the tea, in the bread and butter, in the bassinet, in the hats and sticks and clothes, in the familiar phrases, the quiet unpumped, everyday utterance; in short, in the commonplaces that are now spurned because they are commonplaces, and were then inexpressibly welcome because they were the most unexpected of novelties."(1)

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(1) Hubbell and Beaty: An Introduction to Drama , page 481

The drift toward realism exhibited by Robertson and the translations and imitations of the French social drama was further emphasized by the satires of such men as William Schwenk Gilbert. The most popular playwright between Robertson and Pinero was Henry J. Byron, who followed the Robertsonian tradition. His "Our Boys" produced in 1875, ran for more than one thousand performances consecutively -- the longest run ever enjoyed by a play in the British theater up to that date. In that same year, 1875, Tennyson brought out his play "Queen Mary" in blank verse. "Our Boys" with its face toward the future enjoyed a record run; "Queen Mary" with its face toward the past was a failure.

Slowly but inevitably romanticism began to give ground before the on-coming tide of realism. Another fifteen years after the new impetus given to the theater by Robertson brought to the drama the genius of a group of prose writers who were destined to perfect the reform which he started. Sydney Grundy, Henry Arthur Jones, Sir Arthur Pinero, Oscar Wilde, and later George Bernard Shaw brought the prose drama to the high place of excellence that it now occupies in the modern theater. These men realized the "sustanzia di cose sperate" when Robertson's star appeared in the theatrical sky.

Influence of Ibsen toward Realism and Prose.

Realism and prose received a powerful impetus, also, when the work of Ibsen was brought into the English theater. The outstanding figure in the drama of the last quarter of the century, the result of his tremendous influence was to intensify the trend toward the prose realistic drama. With Ibsen, social problems became the dramatist's problem and, naturally, a realistic technique in the handling of such material demanded prose. From Jones to Galsworthy and Granville-Barker, the influence of Ibsen has been unquestionably the most formative.

The stages through which Henry Arthur Jones passed show very clearly indeed the changing trends of these changing times. His early plays are frankly melodrama. "The Silver King," a melodrama, was received with prodigious delight in London and received praise even from Matthew Arnold. However, as the trend of the day turned more and more to realism, Jones turned with it to everyday reality. From "The Silver King" and "Hoodman Blind," Jones turned to plays like "Wealth" and "The Middleman," which are realistic in theme and attempt to deal seriously with the problems of his own day. The technique of these last plays is that of the turn of the century -- a turn most effective in the commercial theater and hence full of inspiration to those playwrights seeking popular acclaim.

Balance of Power in Drama Passes over from Poetry to Prose.

During the sixty-four years in which Queen Victoria occupied the throne of England, the English theater underwent what was, perhaps, the greatest change in all its history. In 1837 Browning and Lord Bulwer-Lytton both brought their first plays to the theater in blank verse. In 1901, the year in which Victoria's reign came to an end, Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and Oscar Wilde were showing the artistic possibilities of prose for a discussion of the problems of contemporary life.

In 1881, Tennyson's play "The Cup", written in blank verse, was brought out at the Lyceum Theater. In 1881, also, Ibsen produced his play "Ghosts", built around the social problem of heredity and written in prose. That same year, 1881, saw the production of Sir Arthur Pinero's "The Squire", also written in prose. Archer calls Pinero "the regenerator of the English drama", a man to whom we owe "a quite incalculable debt."

Tennyson died in 1892, nine years before Victoria, who died in 1901. His last drama had been given to the stage in 1892, the year of his death. In this year Oscar Wilde brought out his "Lady Windermere's Fan" and George Bernard Shaw his "Widowers' Houses." If Tennyson was a theater-goer, during the last fifteen years of his life he could have witnessed in

London the following plays:

Pinero	"Two Hundred a Year"	1877
Jones	"Only Round the Corner"	1878
Grundy	"The Snowball"	1879
Pinero	"The Squire"	1881
Ibsen	"Ghosts"	1881
Jones	"The Silver King"	1882
Ibsen	"The Wild Duck"	1884
Jones	"Saints and Sinners"	1884
Pinero	"The Magistrate"	1885
"	"The Profligate"	1889
Grundy	"A Pair of Spectacles"	1890
"	"A Fool's Paradise"	1892
Wilde	"Lady Windermere's Fan"	1892
Shaw	"Widowers' Houses"	1892

Men like Wilde, Pinero, Jones, and Shaw were in sympathy with the drift of the times; Tennyson was alien to the trend of the contemporary theater. It is plain to be seen why the former go down in the history of the drama as a success; the latter as a failure.

With the trend of the drama of the century, from Robertson to Shaw, toward prose, those men who still continued to use blank verse were reactionary and retrogressive. Dramatists with the genius of "savoir faire" in the theater realized the drift toward realism and prose, and the futility of running counter to the Zeitgeist.

Summary

We see, then, in Victoria's reign a complete revolution in theatrical art. In sixty-four years there was accomplished a change so sudden and drastic as to be unprecedented. We saw that the Parliamentary act of

1843 freeing the theaters had precipitated a period of dramatic chaos and stagnation into the London theatrical world which offered little inspiration for the poet-dramatist striving for popular success. Through the zeal of managers like Phelps and great actors like Knowles, Macready, Charles Kean, Fechter, and Henry Irving the poetical drama was kept upon the boards.

French melodrama crossed the channel and the piracy of French successes was unabashed. No writer of the poetic drama won popular favor enough to even enter into competition with such a writer of successful melodrama as Boucicault. In Boucicault melodrama reached its height of popularity and the closing decades of the century saw it gradually fade into a degeneracy which took it back into the East Ends and Bowerys of the world where it had originated. The popularity of melodrama showed that success in the theater could be attained without literary merit. It also vitiated the taste of the theater-going public and rendered the poetic play a dramatic form capable of winning enthusiasm from the intelligentsia only.

Beginning with Robertson in the 60's, we find a rising generation of realists who bring into the theater a prose realism dealing with the realities of contemporary, everyday life. Through the 70's and 80's this realistic

impetus struggles for an artistic maturity which it ultimately attains in the work of such men as Pinero and Oscar Wilde.

In 1837, when Victoria began her long reign, we found that the romantic poetical drama was drawing to its service the best poetic pens of the day, and the earnest sympathy and interest of the intelligentsia; sixty-four years later, when her reign closed, we find the prose realistic drama in the ascendency and drawing to itself many of the best pens of the day. At work upon it, we find a group of expert craftsmen well skilled in the science of theatricality. The hope of the poets of the Victorian Era to revive the romantic poetic drama had failed.

A CRITICISM OF THE POETIC DRAMA OF THE MINOR VICTORIAN DRAMATISTS

Types of Dramatic Poetry

In considering the Victorian poetic drama, we ought to distinguish clearly between these three types of dramatic poetry:

1. The dramatic monologue
2. The closet drama
3. The poetic drama

The dramatic monologue is a type of poem, like Browning's "Andrea Del Sarto," in which the author puts his story into the mouth of a single character who relates something that has happened in the past, or is happening in the present. Some other person, and here the dramatic element enters, is supposed to be near at hand. He never enters the story, and we only know what he says by the speaker's repeating a part of what he has heard and replying to it. The term dramatic monologue is used loosely to cover several different types which should, in reality, be more clearly distinguished:

1. The dramatic monologue (proper)
2. The dramatic lyric
3. The dramatic romance
4. The dramatic idyl

"In the dramatic lyric and dramatic monologue proper, the speaker is more likely to be unfolding himself -- his emotional mood or his fuller personality. In the dramatic

romance and dramatic idyl, he is more likely to be unfolding the character of another." (1)

The closet drama, like the dramatic poem, is not intended by the author to be performed in the theater. It is merely intended to be read or to be listened to, and hence earns its name "closet." As this type of play does not seek production, it may include what the actual play must dispense with:

1. Ornate descriptive passages
2. Passages of deep philosophical thought
3. A retarded movement
4. Declamation, oratory, and rhetoric

Prevalence of Unacted Play

In the nineteenth century, for the first time in English literature, we have the unacted play taking a prominent place in the drama of the day. These literary plays have certain characteristics in common:

1. They are all written in verse.
2. They are all romantic rather than realistic.
3. They are practically all modeled upon Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists.
4. They all show little aptitude to meet the actual demands of the theater.
5. They aim at literary rather than theatrical effectiveness.
6. They are practically all deficient in action.
7. They make little attempt to offer popular entertainment.

The unacted play is a pitifully weak and ineffectual thing. In fact, when an author tells us that his play is not

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(1) Beaven, John: A History of English Literature

intended to be acted he makes a tacit, though perhaps unconscious, admission that he is lacking in dramatic ability. It is sheer nonsense to think of the drama apart from actual production before a living audience in the theater. Great as Shakespeare was as a poet, his dramas would have no permanent value if, with his sense of the poetic, he had not possessed a keen sense of the theatrically effective. The dramatist has much in common with the orator; both bend all their energies to the attainment of an immediate and a powerful effect.

The poetic drama is neither the closet drama nor the dramatic poem. It is a play, poetic but also dramatic, having theatrical effectiveness and emotional appeal. A play of action in verse, possessing the beauty and ideality which we associate with poetry at its best. The true poetic play is not one in which the poetry is an ornamentation and beautiful setting for the thought, but one in which the verse is an essential, vital, and integral part of the thought itself. It must stand apart from mere dramatic poetry on the one hand and from mere closet drama on the other. It must be at one and the same time theatrical, dramatic, and poetical.

The following list includes the most significant poet-dramatists of the Victorian Era. It does not include writers

of opera, fantasy, and burlesque; such as Buchanan, Brougham, Simpson, Pettitt, Planché, and H. J. Byron. I have indicated those poets whose contributions were confined to the unacted drama. They are outside of my present consideration, as I am interested in poetic drama solely in relation to its success or failure in meeting the demands of the commercial theater.

VICTORIAN DRAMATISTS
IN THE FIELD OF POETIC DRAMA

1. Adams, Sarah Flower. (Unacted drama)

2. Arnold, Sir Edwin. " "
   Adzuma; or, The Japanese Wife. 1893
   Griselda, a Tragedy. 1856

3. Arnold, Matthew. (Unacted drama)
   Strayed Reveller. 1848
   Empedocles on Etna. 1852
   Merope. 1858

4. Austin, Alfred. (Unacted drama)
   Savonarola. 1881
   Prince Lucifer. 1887

5. Bridges, Robert Seymour. (Unacted drama)
   Nero. 1890
   Palicio (In Eliz. Manner) 1890
   Return of Ulysses. 1890
   Christian Captives. 1890
   Achilles in Cyros. 1892
   Humours of the Court. 1893
   Feast of Bacchus. 1894

6. Browning, Robert.
   Strafford. 1837
   King Victor and King Charles. 1842 (Unacted)
   Return of the Druses. 1843
   Blot in the 'Scutcheon. 1843
   Colombe's Birthday. 1844

Browning, Robert (Continued)
Luria (Unacted) 1845
Soul's Tragedy. 1845 (Half prose)
Dramatic Translations
Balaustion's Adventure; including a Transcript from Euripides. ("Alcestis.") 1871
Aristophanes' Apology, including a Transcript from Euripides, being the Last Adventure of Balaustion. ("Herakles.") 1875
Agamemnon of Aeschylus. 1877

7. Bulwer, Edward George (Earl Lytton)
Duchess de la Vallière. 1836
Richelieu; or, The Conspiracy. 1839

8. Butler, Arthur Gray
Harold; a Drama in Four Acts. 1877 (Unacted)

9. Clough, Arthur Hugh (Unacted Drama)
Dipsychus. 1869

10. Cross, Marian Evans (George Eliot) (Unacted Drama)
Spanish Gypsy. 1868

11. Davidson, John (Unacted Drama)
Bruce; a Chronicle Play

12. Dobell, Sydney Thompson. (Unacted Drama)
Roman. 1850
Balder. 1854

13. "Field, Michael" (Two women) Bradley, Katherine Harris; Cooper, Edith Emma
Callirrhoe. 1884
Fair Rosamond. 1884 (Unacted Drama)
Father's Tragedy. 1885
William Rufus 1885
Loyalty or Love? 1885
Brutus Ultor 1886
Canute the Great. 1887
Cup of Water. 1887
Tragic Mary. 1890
Stephania. 1892
Question of Memory. 1893

14. Gilbert, W. S.
    Blank verse plays
        The Palace of Truth. 1870
        Pygmalion and Galatea. 1871
        The Wicked World. 1873
        Broken Hearts. 1875

15. Gosse, (Prof.) Edm. W. (Unacted Drama)
    King Eric; a Tragedy

16. Horne, Richard Hengist. (Unacted Drama)
    Cosmo di Medici. 1837
    Death of Marlowe. 1837
    Gregory VII; a Tragedy. 1840
    Judas Iscariot. 1848
    Prometheus, the Fire Bringer. 1864
    South-Sea Sisters; a Lyric Masque. 1866
    Laura Dibalzo. 1880
    King Nihil's Round Table; or, The Regicide's Symposium. 1881
    Bible Tragedies. 1881
        Judas Iscariot.
        John the Baptist; or, The Valour of the Soul.

17. Kemble, Fanny (Unacted Drama)
    Francis I. 1832

18. Knowles, James Sheridan.
    Caius Gracchus. 1815
    Virginius. 1820
    William Tell. 1825
    Alfred the Great; or, The Patriot King. 1831
    Hunchback. 1832
    Wife; a Tale of Mantua. 1833
    Beggar of Bethnal Green. 1834
    Daughter. 1837
    Love Chase. 1837
    Woman's Wit. 1838
    Maid of Mariendorpt. 1838
    Love. 1839
    John of Procida; or, The Bridals of Messina. 1840
    Old Maids. 1841
    Rose of Arragon. 1842
    Secretary. 1843

19. Landor, Robert Eyres. (Unacted Drama)
    Count Arezzi. 1823
    Earl of Brecon. 1841
    Faith's Fraud. 1841
    Ferryman. 1841
    Fawn of Sertorius. 1846
    Fountain of Arethusa. 1846

20. Landor, Walter Savage. (Unacted Drama)
    Count Julian. 1810
    Andrea of Hungary. 1839
    Giovanna of Naples. 1839
    Fra Rupert. 1841
    Siege of Ancona

21. Marston, John Westland.
    Patrician's Daughter. 1841
    Borough Politics. 1846
    Heart and the World. 1847
    Strathmore. 1849
    Philip of France. 1850
    Anne Blake. 1852
    Life's Ransom. 1857
    Hard Struggle. 1858
    Wife's Portrait. 1862
    Pure Gold. 1863
    Donna Diana. 1863
    Favorite of Fortune. 1866
    Hero of Romance. 1867
    Life for Life. 1869
    Broken Spells. 1873
    Put to the Test.
    Under Fire. 1885
        Unacted Plays
            Montezuma
            At Bay
            Charlotte Corday

22. Merivale, Herman C. (Plays not obtainable)
    The White Pilgrim

23. Skrine, John Huntley. (Unacted Drama)
    Columbia; a Drama

24. Smith, Alexander. (Unacted Drama)
    Life Drama. 1852

25. Swinburne, Algernon Charles (Unacted Drama)
    Atalanta in Calydon. 1864
    Chastelard. 1865
    Bothwell. 1874
    Erectheus. 1876
    Maria Stuart. 1881
    Marino Faliero. 1885
    Locrine. 1887
    Sisters. 1892

26. Talfourd, Thomas Noon (Called Sergeant Talfourd and Ion Talfourd)
    Ion. 1835
    Athenian Captive. 1838
    Glencoe; or, The Fate of the Macdonalds. 1840

27. Taylor, Henry
    Isaac Comnenus. 1827
    Philip Van Artevelde. 1834
    Edwin the Fair. 1842
    Virgin Widow. (A Sicilian Summer) 1850
    St. Clement's Eve. 1862

28. Tennyson, Alfred.
    Queen Mary. 1875
    Harold. 1877
    Falcon. 1879
    Cup. 1881
    Becket. 1884
    Foresters. 1892 (A fantasy with music by Sir Arthur Sullivan)

29. Webster, Mrs. Augusta (Unacted Drama)
    <u>Translations</u>
        Prometheus Bound: Aeschylus. 1866
        Medea: Euripides. 1868
    <u>Original</u>
        Dramatic Studies. 1866
        Auspicious Day. 1872
        Disguises. 1879
        In a Day. 1882
        Sentence. 1887

30. Wills, W. G.
    Charles the First. 1872
    Jane Shore. 1874

MINOR VICTORIAN DRAMATISTS

SHERIDAN KNOWLES

When Queen Victoria came to the throne, the poetic dramatist receiving most praise from the literary critics of the day was James Sheridan Knowles, a disciple of the Elizabethan school, and an ardent lover of the romantic school in poetry. Knowles was a cousin of the great Richard Brinsley Sheridan and a friend of Lamb, Coleridge, and Hazlitt. From Hazlitt he won the tribute of "the spirit of the age." Frequently he was alluded to as "the first tragic writer of the time." When Peel gave a pension to Tennyson, Bulwer-Lytton made it the occasion of a fierce attack against a day so degenerate that it could not distinguish genuine literary merit. He speaks scathingly of a society that "pensions Tennyson, while starves a Knowles."

Knowles's pleasing blank verse, strong Shakespearian flavor, and romantic spirit beguiled the critics, and misled them into hailing as first-rate what time has clearly shown to be only mediocre. Even now, when time has lent perspective to a view of his work,

the opinion of the critics is varied. Edmund Gosse, whose judgment is, certainly, not to be disdained, says that out of the poetic drama of the age "one shines out like stars of heaven, more fiery by night's blackness -- the 'Virginius' of James Sheridan Knowles -- the most successful of modern tragic drama." Put beside that extravagant praise, Hugh Walker's emphatic condemnation:

"Knowles is a bondman of the commonplace, content to trudge along the earth when he ought to be soaring into the empyrean. . . . . The high reputation of Knowles as a writer of tragedy has long passed away; and whoever reads his works at the present day will marvel how it was ever won." (1)

Time seems to prove the estimates of Walker and Archer who agrees with him more correct than that of Gosse, for to how many are any of the following titles familiar?

Tragedy:
- Caius Gracchus (1815)
- Virginius (1820)
- William Tell (1825)
- Alfred the Great (1831)

Comedy:
- The Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green (1828)
- The Hunchback (1832)
- The Love Chase (1837)
- Old Maids (1841)

These are only a few of the sixteen plays written by Knowles, between the years 1815 and 1843. "Virginius" made his reputation, but "The Hunchback" was the outstanding success of his entire dramatic output.

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(1) Walker, Hugh: The Literature of the Victorian Era

Knowles seemed singularly well prepared for the task which he undertook of reviving the poetical drama. Since 1809 he had been an actor, and the writing of sixteen plays had taught him stage-craft. In Knowles, at least, we have a poet who was also a man of the theater. Unfortunately, however, he lacked the flash of inspiration necessary to high creative work. That peculiarly dramatic ability to stimulate the imagination and arouse the emotions, he did not possess in any marked degree.

His successful tragi-comedy, "The Hunchback," was performed at Covent Garden in 1832, with Fanny Kemble, her father, and Knowles himself in the principal roles. The play was immensely successful, and the author was immediately admired and imitated, and hailed as one of the greatest of living poet-dramatists. Parker records the following productions of "The Hunchback":

Covent Garden --	Fanny Kemble	as Julia	; April 5, 1832
" "	Ellen Tree	" "	; Oct. 3, 1832
Drury Lane --	Miss Phillips	" "	; June 5, 1833
Covent Garden			
Haymarket --	Miss Elphinstone	" "	; Apr. 25, 1838
"	Phelps	as Master Walter	; Oct. 3, 1839
Princess's --	Charlotte Cushman	as Julia	; Apr. 19,1845
Sadler's Wells --	Creswick	as Master Walter	; July 29,1846
Drury Lane --	Isabel Glyn	as Julia	; Jan. 16, 1852
Olympic --	Edith Heraud	" "	; Dec. 16, 1852
Drury Lane --	Fanny Vining"	"	; Apr. 16, 1853
Haymarket --	Barry Sullivan	as Master Walter	; July 5,1853
Drury Lane --	G.V.Brooke	as " "	; Sept.8,1853
Sadler's Wells --	Mrs. Chas. Young	as Julia	; Sept. 15,1857
Haymarket --	Amy Sedgwick	" "	; Mar. 1, 1858
Drury Lane --	Kate Bateman	" "	; Jan. 30,1865
Olympic --	Kate Terry	" "	; June 20,1866

Gaiety -- Ada Cavendish as Julia; March 25, 1872
Queen's -- Mary Leighton " " ; March 28, 1874
Adelphi -- Lillian Adelaide Neilson as Julia;
March 22, 1879
Sadler's Wells -- Isabel Bateman as Julia;
Nov. 17, 1879
Gaiety -- Miss Wallis as Julia; April 26, 1883
Lyceum -- William Terriss as Clifford and
Mary Anderson as Julia; Feb. 24, 1885
Prince of Wales's -- E. S. Willard as Master Walter
and Miss Fortescue as Julia; March 20, 1888
Adelphi -- Mrs. Pat Campbell as Julia; March 18, 1890
Daly's -- Ada Rehan as Julia; July 11, 1893
" Viola Allen" " ; Eben Plympton as
Walter; 1902 (1)

The scene of this tragi-comedy is laid about the time of Charles I. The story opens in a tavern where a crowd of boisterous, sycophantic young gentlemen are celebrating the news of Master Wilford's succession to the title and estates of the Earl of Rochdale. The news of the earl's death is brought to Wilford by his cousin, the hunchback steward of the late Earl. Master Walter, enraged at the lack of respect paid to his dead master, begins to quarrel with the drunken crew. Sir Thomas Clifford, a knighted merchant, comes to Walter's rescue and convinces him of the uselessness of heeding malice proceeding from such an unworthy source. Deeply grateful to Clifford for saving him from a duel, Master Walter tells him he can help him win a wife.

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(1) Parker, John: Who's Who in the Theater

"WALTER. Let's see. Hand free, heart whole,
well favored. So!
Rich, titled. Let that pass. Kind, valiant, prudent.
Sir Thomas, I can help thee to a wife.
Hast thou the luck to win her?

CLIFFORD. Master Walter,
You jest!
WALTER. I do not jest. I like you. Mark -
I like you, and I like not every one.
I saw a wife, sir, can I help you to,
The pearly texture of whose dainty skin
Alone were worth thy baronetcy. Form
And feature has she wherein move and glow
The charms that in the marble cold and still,
Culled by the sculptor's jealous skill, and joined there,
Inspire us. Sir, a maid before whose feet
A duke -- a duke might lay his coronet,
To lift her to his state and partner her
A fresh heart, too -- a young, fresh heart, sir -- one
That Cupid has not toyed with, and a warm one.
Fresh, young and warm. Mark that! A mind to boot.
Wit, sir; sense, taste; a garden strictly tended,
Where naught but what is costly flourishes.
A consort for a king, sir. Thou shalt see her.
CLIFFORD. I thank you, Master Walter. As
you speak,
Methinks I see me at the altar foot,
'Her hand fast locked in mine, the ring put on.'
My wedding bell rings merry in my ear,
And round me throng glad tongues that give me joy
To be the bridegroom of so fair a bride!
WALTER. What -- sparks so thick? We'll
have a blaze anon.

Enter SERVANT

SERVANT. The chariot's at the door.
WALTER. It waits in time.
Sir Thomas, it shall bear thee to the bower
Where dwells this fair, for she's no city belle,
But e'en a Sylvan Goddess.
CLIFFORD. Have with you
WALTER. You'll bless the day you served
the Hunchback, sir." (1)

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(1) Knowles: The Hunchback, Act I, Scene 1

The next scene carries us to a charming country garden where Julia, Master Walter's fair ward, is conversing with her cousin Helen. The scene is closely modelled on the sprightly scene in "The Merchant of Venice" where Portia talks over her suitors with Nerissa. During the course of the dialogue between the two girls, we learn all the antecedent action necessary. Master Walter introduces Clifford, who immediately offers his heart to Julia. She accepts and they all repair to town, where Julia enters so heartily into the fashionable life of London that she becomes quite as fickle, as whimsical, and as temperamental as the other fine ladies of fashion. Clifford overhears Julia express her great joy at wearing a title, and accuses her of marrying his rank and fortune. In anger, Julia accepts the hand of the new Earl of Rochdale but, no sooner has she signed the agreement, than she bitterly repents her haste. The fact that Clifford is overcome by adversity losing both title and estates, only increases her mental anguish, but her guardian tells her that she must be true to her plighted word and renounce Clifford for whom, at last, she openly avows her love. Finally, the deus ex machina appears in the person of Master Walter, who strips the Earl of his title, assuming it himself as the true heir denied in infancy by his father because of his deformity.

He claims Julia as his daughter. Thinking that his deformity would be a barrier between them, he has brought her up in ignorance of their true relationship. He bestows his newly-claimed daughter upon Clifford, whose title and estates have been restored -- how, he promises to explain anon:

"WALTER. Sir Thomas Clifford, take my
daughter's hand,
If now you know the master of her heart.
Give it, my Julia. You suspect, I see,
Well, you shall know anon how keeps Sir Thomas
His baronetcy still, and, for myself,
How jealously of my misshapen back
Made me mistrustful of a child's affections,
Although I won a wife's, so that I dropped
The title of thy father, lest thy duty
Should pay the debt thy love alone could solve.
All this and more that to thy friends and thee
Pertains, at fitting time thou shalt be told.
But now thy nuptials wait, the happy close
Of thy hard trial, wholesome, though severe.
The world won't cheat thee now. Thy heart is proved.
Thou know'st thy peace by finding out its bane,
And ne'er wilt act from reckless impulse more.
[Fall of Curtain]" (1)

The influence of Shakespeare is obvious in the dénouement speech. The many tangles in the plot are unravelled in the same manner that Portia uses in "The Merchant of Venice":

PORTIA. You are all amazed:
Here is a letter; read it at your leisure;
It comes from Padua, from Bellario;
There you shall find that Portia was the doctor
Nerissa there her clerk: Lorenzo here
Shall witness I set forth as soon as you
And even but now returned; I have not yet
Entered my house. Antonio, you are welcome,
And I have better news in store for you

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(1) Knowles: The Hunchback, Act V, Scene 3

Than you expect; unseal this letter soon;
There you shall find three of your argosies
Are richly come to harbor suddenly:
You shall not know by what strange accident
I chanced on this letter." (1)

In this play, Knowles makes use of all the old formulas with a kind of disdainful sincerity that knows what it wants too cearly to discard any useful form of expression because it seems trite. In his age, when the intrigue of comedy began to thicken, it thickened into conventional molds, with characteristic tracings. How often we have cases of mistaken identity, the real heir to the title succeeding just as the final curtain rolls down; a love intrigue brought about by the capriciousness of the fair heroine; the deformity of a hunchback motivating phases of the action; the device of eavesdropping used to further the plot; the presence in the play of a confidant so that the heroine may unveil her heart to the audience; a deus ex machina who, with a wave of his magic wand, removes all difficulties in the way of the lovers; and, of course, a quarrel scene, preferably between the lovers. These situations were the conventions lying about on the stage of the day. They were the "expected situations" which the audience turned out to witness. A great artist does not, necessarily, disregard the "expected situation," but he sublimates it. Not the expected situation, but the

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(1) Shakespeare, William: The Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene 1

expected stock reaction to that situation is what he must shun like death. He must not let his play be played in the naïve and sentimental reactions of the mass mind of his audience. No matter how expected the dénouement, or how familiar the types in the play, he must make us feel that the actors are creating real, living personalities and that they are revealing themselves to us in every significant action that they perform on the stage. Knowles fails to do this, and hence he fails to write great drama.

Knowles had a remarkable facility in the use of words, an extraordinary "flatulence of phrase and epithet" which gave a literary flourish to his style. Buchanan said of him: "His vigour in saying and meaning nothing amounts to genius; his skill in devising and connecting dialogues without a purpose, and yet apparently full of purpose, is fairly astounding." (1)

The low level of the poetic drama can be readily understood when one realizes that James Sheridan Knowles was the most prominent and the most successful poetic dramatist of the first half of the nineteenth century. Among his contemporaries, many of whom were wearing well-earned laurels in the field of literature themselves, he was accepted as a nineteenth century Shakespeare.

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(1) Buchanan: A Look Round Literature

Arthur Hallam thought "The Hunchback" a splendid drama. He wrote of it:

"The scene in the second act, where Fanny Kemble plays the fine lady, was excellent, but the tragic parts yet finer: for instance where Clifford comes in as Secretary, and afterwards where she expostulates with Master Walter. Her 'Clifford, why don't you speak to me?' and 'Clifford, is it you?' and her 'Do it,' with all the accompanying speech, I shall never forget." (1)

After Knowles, poetic drama had few disciples who succeeded in bringing it into the theater before a living, appreciative audience.

SIR THOMAS NOON TALFOURD

It was, certainly, auspicious for the Victorian drama that Macready's two periods of management came during the first six years of that era. From 1837 to 1839 he controlled the choice of plays at Covent Garden, and from 1841 he held the management of Drury Lane. William Archer says: "Macready's management contributed little or nothing to living drama, save the plays of Sir Edward Lytton-Bulwer." (2) However, after reading the memoirs of that great histrionic genius, I feel that Archer is somewhat drastic in his statement. Macready's sincerity and artistry must have done a great deal to keep alive in English hearts a love of the

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(1)Tennyson, A.H.: Memoir, page 83
(2)Archer: The Old Drama and the New

drama during its long "winter solstice." Many of the playwrights of the day acknowledged with deep gratitude the benefit of his encouragement, his cooperation, and his theatrical knowledge. In fact, many of the plays that enjoyed success did so, not because of their intrinsic dramatic merits, but because of Macready's splendid genius. Infusing his magnetic personality into their pallid heroes was like filling them with the breath of life. While gazing on that glowing eye, and listening to the expressive voice, one forgot to take note of dramatic lacks, and because he had passed through a great emotional experience, he thought he had witnessed a great play. But the credit must go to the actor, not to the playwright. No better example of Macready's power can be quoted than his splendid acting of Talfourd's "Ion."

Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, 1795 - 1854, was a poetic dramatist who received great recognition among the literary circles of his own day. A lawyer, a friend and editor of Lamb, a Liberal member of Parliament, and a contributor to the "Edinburgh Review," he was a man thoroughly conversant with the literary trends of the age. His five-act tragedy "Ion," written in blank verse, was first acted at Covent Garden on May 26, 1836. The success of the play, as I have said, was due largely to the talents of Macready,

who played the title role. In all, the play ran through the following productions:

Covent Garden,	May 26, 1836
Haymarket,	August 1, 1836
Covent Garden,	October 13, 1836
Haymarket,	February 13, 1846
Sadler's Wells,	December 17, 1846
Drury Lane,	February 27, 1850

The success of "Ion" encouraged Talfourd to produce "The Athenian Captive" in 1838 and "Glencoe" in 1840. In all three plays, he aims to recreate a poetical drama. Talfourd did not write his play "Ion" for "actual representation" in the theater. In fact, he points out so well the factors that would impair its theatrical effectiveness that I am quoting his own explanation of its weakness from the point of view of the stage.

"If it ['Ion'] were regarded as a drama composed for actual representation, I am well aware that not in 'matter of form' only, but in 'matter of substance,' it would be found wanting. The idea of the principal character, -- that of a nature essentially pure and disinterested, deriving its strength entirely from goodness and thought, not overcoming evil by the force of will, but escaping it by an insensibility to its approach, -- vividly conscious of existence and its pleasures, yet ready to lay them down at the call of duty, -- is scarcely capable of being rendered sufficiently striking in itself, or of being subjected to such agitations, as tragedy requires in the fortunes of its heroes. It was further necessary, in order to involve such a character in circumstance which might excite terror or grief or joy, to introduce other machinery than that of passions working naturally within, or events arising from ordinary and probable motives without; as its own elements would not supply the contests of tragic emotion, nor would its sufferings, however accumulated, present a varied or impressive picture. Recourse has therefore been had, not only

to the old Grecian notion of Destiny, apart from all moral agencies, and to a prophecy indicating its purport, in references to the individuals involved in its chain, but to the idea of fascination, as an engine by which Fate may work its purposes on the innocent mind, and force it into terrible action most uncongenial to itself, but necessary to the issue. Either perhaps of these aids might have been permitted, if used in accordance with the entire spirit of the piece; but the employment of both could not be justified in a drama intended for visual presentation, in which a certain verisimilitude is essential to the faith of the spectator. Whether any groups, surrounded with the associations of the Greek Mythology, and subjected to the capricious laws of Greek superstition, could be endowed by genius itself with such present life as to awaken the sympathies of an English audience, may well be doubted; but it cannot be questioned, that except by sustaining a stern unity of purpose, and breathing an atmosphere of Grecian sentiment over the whole, so as to render the picture national and coherent in all its traits, the effect must be unsatisfactory and unreal. Conscious of my inability to produce a work thus justified to the imagination by its own completeness and power, I have not attempted it; but have sought, out of mere weakness, for 'Fate and metaphysical aid,' to 'crown withal' the ordinary persons of a romantic play. I have, therefore, asked too much for a spectator to grant: but the case is different with the reader who does not seek the powerful excitements of the theater, nor is bound to a continuous attention; and who, for the sake of scattered sentiments or expressions which may please him, may, at least, by a latitude of friendly allowance, forgive the incongruities of the machinery by which the story is conducted. This drama may be described as the phantasm of a tragedy -- not a thing of substance mortised into the living rock of humanity, -- and therefore incapable of exciting that interest which grows out of human feeling, or of holding that permanent place in the memory which truth only can retain."(1)

Macready, however, felt that "Ion" offered him a good histrionic vehicle and Talfourd yielded to his judgment. So the play went on at Covent Garden. Talfourd says:

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(1) Talfourd, Sir Thomas Noon: Ion, Preface

"His [Macready's] consent to produce the drama on the night of his benefit secured it against painful repulse; and, although I had still no expectation that even he could endue it with sufficient interest to render it attractive on ordinary occasions, I looked forward to its single representation in the belief that it would be tolerated by an audience disposed to be gratified, and that the impression it might leave, however faint, would be genial and pure. Many of those who had expressed the most favourable opinions of the piece as a composition were even less sanguine than myself as to the probable event of the evening, and apprehended that it would terminate in their mortification and my own. They did not perceive the possibility of infusing such life into the character of its youthful hero, as would bring the whole fable within the sphere of human sympathies; reconcile the audience to its machinery; and render that which seemed only consistent in its dreaminess, at once entire and real. Such was, however, unquestionably the effect of Mr. Macready's performance on that evening, which I believe, -- in the judgment of many who cannot be influenced, like the author, by personal regard or individual gratitude, -- was one of the most remarkable triumphs of art which have graced the stage within living memory. Although other of his performances were abstractedly greater, none I believe equalled this as an effort of art, estimated with reference to the nature of the materials which he animated, to difficulties which he subdued, and to the preconceptions which he charmed away. By the graces of beautiful elocution, he beguiled the audience to receive the drama as belonging to a range of associations which are no longer linked with the living world, but which retain an undying interest of a gentler cast, as a thing which <u>might have been</u>; and then, by his fearful power of making the fantastic real, he gradually rendered the whole possible -- probable -- true! The consequence of this extraordinary power of vivifying the frigid, and familiarising the remote, was to dissipate the fears of my friends; to render the play an object of attraction during the short remainder of the season; and to embolden others to attempt the part, and encourage other audiences to approve it, even when the power which first gave it sanction was wanting.

". . . . The unhoped-for prolongation of the dramatic life of 'Ion' has not altered the opinion of its essential defects which I expressed in the original preface; but it has been delightful to me, not only because it has gratified an author's passionate desire for the embodiment of his work in theatrical action, but because it has induced

"a conviction that gentleness and self-sacrifice have charms for the multitude which neither the frigidity of a Greek plot, nor the feebleness of its development, nor manifold errors of composition, can destroy." (1)

The story of the tragedy is one of classic simplicity. The city of Argos is devastated by a pestilence, which both priests and people feel comes as a punishment from the gods because of the reckless debauchery of their tyrant Adrastus, who has promised death to anyone who dares to brook him in his palace with a message of warning. Young Ion, a foster-child of Medon, High Priest of the Temple of Apollo, is a spiritual youth of rare charm, endeared to all for his comeliness and gentleness.

"Ion our sometime darling, whom we prized
As a stray gift, by bounteous Heaven dismiss'd
From some bright sphere which sorrow may not cloud
To make the happy happier! Is he sent
To grapple with the miseries of this time,
Whose nature such ethereal aspect wears
As it would perish at the touch of wrong?
By no internal contest is he train'd
For such hard duty; no emotions rude
Has his clear spirit vanquish'd; -- Love, the germ
Of his mild nature, has spread graces forth,
Expanding with its progress, as the store
Of rainbow colour which the seed conceals
Sheds out its tints from its dim treasury,
To flush and circle in the flower. No tear
Has fill'd his eye save that of thoughtful joy
When, in the evening stillness, lovely things
Press'd on his soul too busily; his voice,
If, in the earnestness of childish sports,
Raised to the tone of anger, check'd its force,
As if it fear'd to break its being's law,
And faltered into music; when the forms
Of guilty passion have been made to live
In pictured speech, and others have wax'd loud
In righteous indignation, he has heard
With sceptic smile, or from some slender vein

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(1) Talfourd, Sir Thomas Noon: Dramatic Works , Preface, page 11

"Of goodness, which surrounding gloom conceal'd,
Struck sunlight o'er it: so his life has flow'd
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
Alone are mirror'd; which, though shapes of ill
May hover round its surface, glides in light
And takes no shadow from them." (1)

Ion feels that he has been appointed by the gods to carry the warning of the priests to the tyrant. Struck by the youth's unusual grace and deep sincerity, Adrastus listens, and something in Ion's voice makes his tragic life's story rise up before him. At the tyrnat's birth the prophecy had been uttered:

". . . . Woe unto the babe!
Against the life which now begins shall life,
Lighted from thence, be arm'd and, both soon quench'd,
End this great line in sorrow!" (2)

Horrified by this omen, the young prince became a curse to his parents. When the second son, upon whom they lavished their love, fell from a cliff, they believed that Arastus had foully murdered him. He fled from his home; found happiness in the love of a beautiful maiden; and was blessed with a son. Soon, however, hireling slaves of his parents tracked him down, seized the child and bore it to its death, while the young mother died of grief in her husband's arms. Now, as king, he passes broken-hearted from orgy to orgy in a vain attempt to forget the past.

Adrastus spares Ion's life but, refusing to

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(1) Talfourd, Sir Thomas Noon: Ion , Act I, Scene 1
(2) Ibid., Act II, Scene 3

humble himself as a penitent, he is told that Apollo has decreed:

"Argos ne'er shall find release
 Till her monarch's race shall cease." (1)

The young patriots of Argos draw lots to see which shall rid their city of its tyrant, and Fate decrees that Ion shall be the one. Just as he is about to do the deed, Medon rushes to him with the news that he is the long lost son of Adrastus. Ion stays his hand, but Adrastus is assassinated by another young patriot. So Ion succeeds to the kingship of Argos.

At the coronation service, Ion offers his young life upon the altar of Apollo, a holocaust to appease the wrath of the gods:

". . . . Gracious gods!
In whose mild service my glad youth was spent,
Look on me now; -- and if there is a Power,
As at this solemn time I feel there is,
Beyond ye, that has breathed through all your shapes
The Spirit of the Beautiful that lives
In earth and heaven; to you I offer up
This conscious being, full of life and love,
For my dear country's welfare. Let this blow
End all her sorrows!" (2)

The exhaustive psychological insight into the character of Ion which Talfourd gives us is not consistent with the rapidity of movement that successful drama must have. Nor does the dramatist display any certainty of

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(1) Talfourd, Sir Thomas Noon: Ion , Act II, Scene 3
(2) Ibid., Act V, Scene 3

handling; his speeches are long and often weariness; and, although we get vistas of new ideas of life and new beauty of the soul, they come to us obscured by rhetoric. The plot is thread-like, throwing the character of Ion into dramatic relief, but leaving the rest of the cast shadows on the stage curtain.

In his play, Talfourd seems to be developing a theme much beyond his power to realize for the stage, and this remoteness gives frigidity to his style. Somehow, we are never stirred to poignancy, and we have a sense that this theme of struggle, love, and sacrifice might have been emotionally far more effective than he has made it. It does not satisfy the craving for happy absorption in other people's fates which is the mainspring of theatrical interest.

WESTLAND MARSTON

Another blank verse dramatist of the Victorian Era was Westland Marston. His first play was "The Patrician's Daughter" -- and it should, indeed, have been his last. It is inexorably and unsufferably bad, and proves most emphatically the futility of the nineteenth century attempt at resuscitation of effete poetical models. The play was performed at the Theater Royal,

Drury Lane, December 10, 1842, with a remarkably fine supporting cast. It is pathetic to think of Macready and Miss Faucit wasting their splendid talents on such maudlin sentimentality as this.

In the preface to his edition of his dramas, Marston has this note of explanation which is valuable as his own elucidation of the problem about which the dramatic action revolves.

"The end proposed was simply to exhibit, as impartially as might be, the conflict between the pride of Aristocracy and that of Democracy, with the evils resulting from their collision. There were not wanting, however, those who sought to identify the dramatist with his 'Radical' hero; while some, on the other hand, were found to reproach him with a Tory bias. A little reflection, however, would have shown that if it had been intended to hold up Mordaunt's conduct for approval, he would hardly have been visited with the retribution which befell him at the close. However warmly the writer might have espoused the doctrine that claims derived from human qualities outweight those of accident and convention, it might have been thought obvious that he had given no sanction to the retaliation (though not unprovoked) by which Mordaunt asserts the doctrine. The hero of the piece, indeed, is clearly represented as a man who, deluded by the sophistry of wounded pride, has unconsciously indulged a passion in the belief that he was vindicating a principle. To one charge, however, that of revenging himself upon his betrothed, this much-erring Mordaunt may fairly plead -- Not guilty. It is against the Patrician House, which has wronged and humiliated him -- not against the daughter of that house -- that his retaliation is levelled." (1)

One reading of "The Patrician's Daughter" eliminates the author unconditionally from the theater. Marston's play is but a vehicle of five acts through which he gives us

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(1) Marston, Westland: The Dramatic and Poetical Works

his philosophy of the brotherhood of man. In using this idea-content, Marston was nearer the contemporary "Zeitgeist" than any of the other dramatic Romanticists. Now, if he had given us a flow of life of which all of his philosophy of democracy was a rich complement, he might have written a great play. As it is, the play has not even good craftsmanship to redeem it from failure. There is no mistaking the sincerity of Marston's message, because there is not a moment during the play when he allows his idea to leave the hearing of his audience.

In the opening scene, the conflict upon which the play is to turn is made obvious to even the dullest mind in the audience. The Earl of Lynterne, a typical "little Englander" of the strongest Tory brand, urges his daughter Mabel to be true to her blood and rank and never to marry beneath her. Considering that Mabel has no desire to do otherwise, and that she does not meet the heroic commoner for some scenes to come, all this admonishment seems terribly far-fetched. However, we see the point of the warning when, in the next scene, Mordaunt receives, for no good reason that can be discovered, an invitation to visit the Earl, a political enemy whom he has never met and whom he has every reason to dislike. The expected happens and the young people fall in love. Treachery and

intrigue, in the person of an aristocratic aunt, thwart the course of true love, and the young couple are torn rudely apart. The aunt's deceitful ruse succeeds and Mordaunt believes that he has been but the sport of a patrician's idle hour, while Mabel thinks him a presumptuous, intruding commoner. Spurned because of his humble birth, believing himself the victim of Mabel's heartlessness, Mordaunt vows vengeance upon the social order responsible for his suffering. Five years pass by and we find Mordaunt knighted and the political idol of the hour. The Earl, for reasons never explained to the audience, now begs Mordaunt to marry his daughter. The exalted commoner deigns to accede to this request, but at the ceremony refuses to wed the lady, relating to the guests the story of the humiliation and shame inflicted upon him five years ago. Again time passes. Mabel, sinking under the blow to her patrician pride, slowly fades toward the grave. At last Aunt Lydia confesses her dastardly duplicity, and the Earl rushes to Mordaunt with this proof of Mabel's innocence. Mabel, dying woman that she is, refuses to see her noble father so demean himself, and rushes after him to restrain his petition for her forgiveness. But the Earl arrives first, and our hero learns the bitter truth -- he has lacerated the loving heart of a faithful woman. Mabel arrives in time to bid the men forgive one

another and embrace, and then she falls dead in Mordaunt's arms:

"MABEL. My fate is gentler, love,
Than I had dared to hope. I shall not live
Encircled by thine arms; but I may die so. [Sinks back.]
MORDAUNT. [Rising and turning away.] I cannot bear it; Oh I cannot bear it.
Fool! Not to know the vengeance of forgiveness!
EARL. You see, sir, that the wound is deep enough.
MABEL. Nay, speak not harshly; for in noble minds
Error is suffering, and we should soothe
The breast that bears its punishment within.
Tell me that you forgive him. Do not pause.
Stint not the af luent affection now,
That hitherto outran my need in granting --
All dimly floats before me. While I yet
Can hear your voice, tell me that you forgive him!
[Mabel has now raised herself, and stands erect.]
EARL. I do, I do!
MABEL. Now take him to your arms,
And call him son.
EARL. Thou art obeyed: -- My son!
MORDAUNT. [Advancing.] My father!
[Mabel joins their hands.]
MABEL. I am happy -- very happy!
[She falls into Mordaunt's arms -- a short pause -- she dies.]

Curtain (1)

So the play moves through five acts of dull pathos and oppressive sentimentality. The author does not pretend to motivate the action, and in a manner quite naïve just lets things happen. The fact that none of the action of the play will bear analysis is certainly an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual emptiness. Of all the poor plays produced by the poetic revival, Marston's seem to me the poorest.

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(1) Marston, Westland: The Patrician's Daughter, Act V, Scene 2

HENRY TAYLOR

A nineteenth century poetic play that was received with extravagant praise was "Philip Van Artevelde" by Henry Taylor (1800 - 1886). The historical subject was suggested to Taylor by his friend Southey. Macready, who should have been a first-class judge, was profoundly impressed when he read it. In his inimitable Diary he records his first impression: "There is so much truth, philosophy, poetry, and beauty combined with passion and descriptive power of no ordinary character, that I was obliged to force myself to lay the book down." Taylor had not intended the play for production, but Macready thought it good enough to produce, and brought it out in 1847 at the Princess's Theater. After five performances it was withdrawn, much to the great actor's chagrin. Although written in excellent blank verse, as a drama it fails woefully in craftmanship. It is, really, a novel in verse. The author himself calls it a "Historical Romance cased in dramatic form." The characters are revealed to us; they do not reveal themselves. Long before they appear, at least before they become prominent, they are carefully described. So far from experiencing any surprise at anything they do, we are prepared for it -- we anticipate it. There is, in consequence, a lack of

exciting situations, and nothing of the startling effect of the unexpected in which the drama delights. The laborious preparation of the mind for what is coming is conspicuous in the way the chief character is heralded. Philip Van Artevelde is to be the great leader of Ghent against the Earl of Flanders. It takes the whole of the first act to get him into his situation, and by the time he has got there, we know him so well that we feel confident just how he must conduct himself. Such a method of depicting characters is legitimate in the novel, but it does not do for the stage. In the drama, revealing and unfolding character is preferable to describing it. The great dramatists display persons in action, striving and battling with foes or circumstances, and evincing in the struggle a variety of capacities and potentialities. Taylor fails to shadow forth the personality of his hero in this way. We feel that the plot is an artificial creation and not an organic growth. It leaves us cold and, although mildly interested, our deeper emotions are not stirred to any profound depths. Taylor's failure is typical of the unsuccessful poetic attempts of the time and yet, he tells us himself, its reputation among London's best was sufficient to open to him the doors of Lansdowne House and Holland House -- the two great literary salons of the day.

It is surprising to us that Southey, Wordsworth, and Swinburne paid Taylor rare tribute, and all expressed the highest admiration for his dramatic power. In 1850 Macaulay wrote to Taylor praising his play "The Virgin Widow," speaking of it as "cheerful, graceful, and gentle." "Nevertheless," he continues, "Philip Van Artevelde is still, in my opinion, the best poem that the last thirty years have produced; and I wish that you would deprive it of that pre-eminence, a feat which nobody but yourself seems likely to accomplish." Could a more striking illustration be found of the worthlessness of contemporary criticism? All these men knew themselves "to sing and build the lofty rhyme," and yet they took this dross for gold.

TOM TAYLOR

One of the best of the poetic plays produced by the Victorian Romantic school was "The Fool's Revenge," by Tom Taylor (1817 - 1880), suggested by a work of Victor Hugo. The author defends his original treatment of his theme, saying in the preface to his first edition of the play:

> "This drama is in no sense a translation, and ought not, I think, in fairness, to be called even an adaptation of Victor Hugo's fine play, 'Le Roi's Amuse.'

". . . . I should not have thought it necessary to say thus much, had not some of the newspaper critics talked of my work as a simple translation of Victor Hugo's drama, while others described it, more contemptuously, as a mere rifaciamento of Verdi's libretto.

"Those who will take the trouble to compare my work with either of its alleged originals, will see that my play is neither translation nor rifaciamento.

"The motives of Bertuccio, the machinery by which his revenge is diverted from its intended channel, and the action in the court subsequent to the carrying off of his daughter, are my own, and I conceive that these features give me the fullest right to call the 'The Fool's Revenge' a new play, even if the use of Victor Hugo's 'Triboulet and Blanche' disentitle it to the epithet 'original' -- which is matter of opinion."

"The Fool's Revenge" was first presented at Sadler's wells, London, in 1859, staged by Mr. Phelps, who played the part of the jester admirably himself. Later, it was put on at Niblo's Garden with Edwin Booth in the title role of Bertuccio, the jester.

Bertuccio, jester of Duke Manfredi, lord of Faenza, lives but for the purpose of avenging the bitter wrong done to him by Malatesta, a noble of the court. Years before the play opens, Malatesta, had seized the jester's beautiful young wife and borne her off, leaving him in helpless despair with an infant daughter. Driven mad by this foul crime, Bertuccio recovered to assume a position as court jester, under an assumed name, his mind now a twisted, deformed, malicious thing in keeping with his mis-shapen, hunchbacked body. Only one beautiful thing is left

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(1) Taylor, Tom: The Fool's Revenge, Preface

to him in life -- his fair daughter Fiordelisa, whom he guards jealously against the vileness of the world in which he lives.

Knowing that the Duchess Francesca is insanely jealous of her husband's open admiration for Malatesta's young wife Ginevra, Bertuccio sees a way to accomplish his revenge. "A wife for a wife" is his dark plan; and, to this end, he incites the Duke to abduct Ginevra during the temporary absence of his Duchess. Meanwhile, he keeps Francesca's jealousy stirred up to the point of madness, and promises to send her word if he has proof of her husband's unfaithfulness. Unfortunately for Bertuccio's plans, the suspicious Malatesta hurries his wife out of the court, and the disappointed Duke, told of Fiordelisa's beauty, resolves to console himself with her youth and loveliness.

The jester does not know that his daughter, seeking protection against the Duke, has been given shelter by Malatesta and lodged in Ginevra's chamber. However, the Duke, fully cognizant of this, thinks it a good joke that his jester is aiding in the abduction of his idolized daughter, under the impression that it is his enemy's wife. Bertuccio, blindly accomplishing his revenge, brings back the Duchess who poisons the wine to be borne in to her husband and her rival. As the jester gloats over his revenge,

he hears that the real victim of the Duke is Fiordelisa. Half-crazed, he rushes to Manfredi's chamber to find the Duke poisoned, but Fiordelisa, who has not tasted the wine, still alive.

The action of the play moves swiftly; the dialogue is rapid and incisive; and the blank verse, flexible and musical. However, with the exception of Bertuccio, none of the characters is more than a shadow. The jester, alone, takes on the breath of life and moves through the play with individuality and distinction. The play is weighted down, also, with old-fashioned conventions which clog the action and render the atmosphere artificial. The "asides" are all too numerous; soliloquies are made to furnish the audience with details of the plot which the dialogue should disclose. The seduction theme is trite; Taylor has nothing fresh or invigorating to bring to the revenge theme, much better handled by his Elizabethan and French masters. The secret door, the concealing arras, the device of eavesdropping, mistaken identity, the misshapen villain, wronged girlish innocence -- all of these conventions by the middle of the nineteenth century had become shopworn, especially in a century which could not present to them as naive an audience as had enjoyed them in former ages.

The dénouement illustrates the artificiality which mars the play:

"[Dell 'Aquila has brought Fiordelisa
forward. Bertuccio takes her in his arms.]
Dead! dead! My bird --
My lily flower -- gone to thy last account
All sinless as thou wert? My fool's revenge,
Ends but in this. Cold! cold! [Putting his hand on her
heart.]
Ha! Yes! a beat!
A breath! A full deep breath! She lives! she lives!
Say some of you, 'she drank not,' and I'll bless
The man that says so; yea, so pray for him
As saints ne'er prayed! She breathes -- still. Hark! hark!
FIORDELISA. Father!
TORELLI. [To Francesca] Madam, you are our
prisoner; the duke
Lies foully murdered.
FRANCESCA. Ha! what call you 'foully?'
Who but myself can estimate my wrongs?
For those who stand, like him, past reach of justice,
Vengeance takes Justice's sharp sword.
My father, Giovanni Bentivoglio
Stands at your gates, in arms! Let who will question
Francesca Bentivoglio of this deed!
FIORDELISA. Father, let's pray for her!
BERTUCCIO. For her! -- for me!
We need it both! Ah, thou said'st well, my child;
Vengeance is not man's attribute, but heaven's.
I have usurped it. Pray -- oh, pray for me.
[The curtain falls.]" (1)

Here the sentimental justice of the determined happy ending strikes a false note. The feeling of some Romanticists that all must be "right" is as inartistic as the studied gloom of an unsuccessful realist.

In his "Poetics" Aristotle says that the two things most interesting and affecting in the action of a tragedy are:

1. Reversals of fortune, "Peripetia"

2. Recognition scenes, "Anagnorisis"

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(1) Taylor, Tom: The Fool's Revenge, Act III, Scene 1

Taylor employs both of these devices to stimulate interest, but in this play, neither seems the natural and inevitable result of the play's thematic growth. They seem but the old theatricality of bad drama. Although a vivid presentation, Taylor's play is by no means that profound observation of life that we get in great drama.

VICTORIAN BURLESQUE WRITERS

James R. Planché, (1796 - 1880) is of interest to us simply because he did much to popularize the comic spirit in the theater and thus to prepare the way for Gilbert, the master comic spirit of the century. Planché does not belong in an account of the legitimate drama as he wrote harlequinades, burlesques, melodramas, and operas. His extravaganzas were performed for the first time in 1825 and their popularity continued until 1871. As author, adapter, and translator he has over one hundred dramatic pieces of every possible sort to his credit. Unfortunately, his dream of bringing a comedy to the English stage of the type of Aristophanes was wholly unsuccessful. As he worked in the realm of the illegitimate drama, he is outside our study, but he is important because he created a demand for that pleasant, never vulgar style of jocularity which Gilbert was to satisfy so completely.

There was a little flair of burlesque about the middle of the nineteenth century but no one of this group of humorists, with the sole exception of Gilbert, is an artist -- Gilbert reigns alone. Burnand, who wrote in Cockney slang; H. J. Byron, William Brough, John Brougham, J. Palgrave Simpson, Pettit, Reece, and Blanchard, who also excelled in pantomimes, are a few of the burlesque writers who wrote "in verse or worse," and whose extravaganzas and meretricious foolery delighted the London of Victoria's day. None of them has survived.

James Albery, besides his prose comedies, wrote two fanciful plays, a kind of "poetic extravaganza": "Oriana," produced at the Globe, and "The Will of Wise King Kino," produced at the Princess's. These plays are not now obtainable, but William Archer says that neither was successful. (1)

WILLIAM SCHWENK GILBERT

William Schwenk Gilbert is, perhaps, the greatest contribution that the Victorian Age made to the theater, but it is in the field of the opera, and not in the drama, that he excels. Although he wrote many non-musical plays, in none of them did he approach anything like the excellence

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(1) Archer: English Dramatists of Today

he achieved in his operas. When he stepped out of the musical sphere, his genius seemed to desert him. For the fresh and original charm of his humor, that engaging nonsense of his, and for his ingenious versification, we have to go to "Pinafore" and "The Mikado." Here he showed himself a genuine man of the theater, with a keen consciousness of stage effectiveness and popular taste.

Unfortunately, in his poetical plays, his blank verse lacks flexibility, and has none of that ease and fluency that is so characteristic of his operatic rhyming measures. Even his sense of the theater seems to fail him, and the artificiality which we respond to gaily in his operatic situations, strikes us as clumsy and awkward in his legitimate dramas.

Gilbert's work in the theater may be classified under three heads:

1. Operas
2. Blank verse fairy and classical plays
3. Prose dramas

His four blank verse plays are:

1. The Palace of Truth, 1870
2. Pygmalion and Galatea, 1871
3. The Wicked World, 1873
4. Broken Hearts, 1875

The first three of these poetical plays were produced at the Haymarket, and Mr. and Mrs. Kendal acted in all of them.

All four plays deal with fairy or magical transformations and are sincere efforts to re-capture that delightful imaginative mood in which Shakespeare wove his "Midsummer Night's Dream."

"Pygmalion and Galatea" was brought out at the Haymarket in 1871. It is the only one of Gilbert's which Brander Matthews includes in his collection "Chief British Dramatists," and he appends the following note to it:

"It was written to order to fit the members of the long-established Haymarket company then under the management of J. B. Buckstone. The broad low comedy part was devised to suit the peculiarities of Buckstone himself, while the hero and heroine were adjusted to the talents of Mr. and Mrs. Kendal. It is a better piece of work than its immediate predecessor, 'The Palance of Truth,' and its immediate successor 'The Wicked World,' also written to order for the Haymarket company. It is, in its way, a clever piece of work, with many touches of its author's ironic humor; but it is artificial in plot and inadequate in its character delineation. Moreover, Gilbert, who was a master of rhyme, did not disclose an equal mastery in his handling of blank verse. His lines seem not a little labored; and they are sometimes thin and almost empty. At the Haymarket the play was fairly successful; it was better than any of the other blank verse plays of the period; and the part of Galatea provided opportunities for an actress, as seen when the play was revived at the Lyceum in 1883 by Miss Mary Anderson, then in the springtime of her beauty and in the summer of her art. With her as the center of attraction the play had a long run in London, and it repeated its triumph when the actress returned to her native land. But when she relinquished the part, the piece was not strong enough to stand alone; and it has not been seen on the stage since."(1)

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(1) Matthews, Brander: The Chief British Dramatists, Appendix

"Pygmalion and Galatea" saw many productions in London:

Haymarket,	Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, Dec. 9, 1871
"	Charles Harcourt and Marion Terry, Jan. 20, 1877
Lyceum,	J. H. Barnes and Mary Anderson, Dec. 1, 1883
"	William Terriss and Mary Anderson, Sept. 6, 1884
"	F. H. Macklin and Mary Anderson with Julia Neilson as Cynisca, Mar. 21, 1888
Savoy,	Lewis Waller and Julia Neilson as Galatea, May 16, 1888
Comedy,	Fuller Mellish and Janette Steer June 7, 1900
His Majesty's,	Basil Gill and Mary Anderson, Oct. 20, 1916
Coliseum,	April 23, 1917
Scala,	Mr. and Mrs. F. J. Nettlefold, June 27, 1919. (1)

When produced at the Lyceum in 1883 with Mary Anderson, the play saw one hundred two continuous performances.

In "Pygmation and Galatea," Gilbert tells the ancient classical story of the statue invoked into life and beautiful womanhood but to fall in love with its creator. In this case, the love of Galatea is embarassing to the sculptor Pygmalion, as he is already very much in love with his wife Cynisca. Cynisca, before her marriage, had been a "holy nymph of Artemis, pledged to eternal maidenhood," and after ardent entreaty had received permission to wed with this strange power to boot:

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(1) Parker, John: Who's Who in the Theater

"Go girl, and wed Pygmalion;
But mark my words, whichever one of you,
Or he or she, shall falsify the vow
Of perfect conjugal fidelity --
The wronged one, he or she, shall have the power
To call down blindness on the backslider,
And sightless shall the truant mate remain
Until expressly pardoned by the other." (1)

The story unfolds just as we forsee it from the embryonic plot sketched in Artemis's nuptial speech. Galatea, in her naive, unmoral way, asks for Pygmalion's love; but his fidelity to his wife is strong enough to act as a shield against even this well-nigh overwhelming temptation. However, Cynesca misunderstands his affection as a creator for this creature that he has called into being, and invokes the blindness which the goddess has promised as the penalty for unfaithfulness. Galatea, fast growing into a sense of moral values through her suffering as a mortal, finally proves Pygmalion's faithfulness to Cynisca, whose forgiveness restores his sight automatically. Galatea, not wishing to live without love, once more steps upon her pedestal and slowly stiffens into marble.

The play contains many situations effective enough to arouse dramatic interest, notably the scene in which Galatea springs from marble into life, and the scene in which Cynisca invokes the curse of Artemis upon Pygmalion. But the characters are merely silhouettes cast on a stage curtain and the extreme artificiality of the plot prevents

(1) Gilbert, W. S.: Pygmalion and Galatea, Act I, lines 167-174

us from identifying ourselves with any of them. Evidently a device which can be used successfully in an opera, will not do in a drama, for many of Gilbert's dramatic subterfuges seem clumsy and antiquated in his plays. Too many times he has his characters "enter unobserved" to pick up the tail end of soliloquies and dialogues. This is too artificial a method altogether of motivating the situations to follow.

The blank verse of the play is easy to read, but lacks pliability. The majority of end-stopped lines imposes a stiffness upon the verse. Even in the most impassioned moments of the play, Gilbert seldom breaks through the measured rhythm of the five-stressed line into the freedom of run-on-verse. The passage in which the playwright describes Galatea's impressions as she warms from stone into life is one of the freest and most impassioned in the play:

"GALATEA. Then is this life?
PYGMALION. It is.
GALATEA. And not long since
I was a cold, dull stone! I recollect
That was the first dull gleam of consciousness;
I became conscious of a chilly self,
A cold immovable identity,
I knew that I was stone, and knew no more!
Then, by an imperceptible advance,
Came the dim evidence of outer things,
Seen, -- darkly and imperfectly -- yet seen --
The walls surrounded me, and I, alone.
That pedestal -- that curtain -- then a voice

"That called on Galatea! At that word,
Which seemed to shake my marble to the core,
That which was dim before, came evident.
Sounds, that had hummed around me, indistinct,
Vague, meaningless -- seemed to resolve themselves
Into a language I could understand;
I felt my frame pervaded with a glow
That seemed to thaw my marble into flesh;
Its cold hard substance throbbed with active life,
My limbs grew supple, and I moved -- I lived!
Lived in the ecstasy of a new-born life!
Lived in the love of him that fashioned me!
Love, gratitude -- thoughts that resolved themselves
Into one word, that word, Pygmalion!" (1)

Another passage of beauty is the one in which Galatea tells Myrine of her first experience of sleep and dreams:

"And then I sat alone and wept -- and wept
A long, long time for my Pygmalion.
Then by degrees, by tedious degrees,
The light -- the glorious light! -- the god-sent light!
I saw it sink -- sink -- sink -- behind the world!
Then I grew cold -- cold -- as I used to be,
Before my loved Pygmalion gave me life.
Then came the fearful thought that, by degrees,
I was returning into stone again!
How bitterly I wept and prayed aloud
That it might not be so! 'Spare me, ye gods!
'Spare me,' I cried, 'for my Pygmalion.
A little longer for Pygmalion!
Oh, take me not so early from my love;
Oh, let me see him once -- but once again!'
But no -- they heard me not, for they are good,
And had they heard, must needs have pitied me;
They had not seen thee, and they did not know
The happiness that I must leave behind.
I fell upon thy couch [to Myrine]; my eyelids closed,
My senses faded from me one by one;
I knew no more until I found myself,
After a strange dark interval of time,
Once more upon my hated pedestal,
A statue -- motionless -- insensible;
And then I saw the glorious gods come down!

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(1) Gilbert, W. S.: Pygmalion and Galatea, Act I, lines 315-341

Down to this room! the air was filled with them!
They came and looked upon Pygmalion,
And looking on him, kissed him one by one,
And said, in tones that spoke to me of life,
'We cannot take her from such happiness!
Live Galatea, for his love!' And then
The glorious light that I had lost came back --
There was Myrine's room, there was her couch,
There was the sun in heaven; and the birds
Sang once more in the great green waving trees,
As I had heard them sing -- I lived once more
To look on him I love!

MYRINE. 'Twas but a dream!
Once every day this death occurs to us,
Till thou and I and all who dwell on earth
Shall sleep to wake no more!" (1)

Notice the monotonous regularity of the line here, a time surely, when emotion should burst all bounds and rush in a vivid torrent of volubility:

"CYNISCA passionately. I need not wherewithal!
I carry wherewithal within my heart!
Oh, I can conjure up the scene at will
When he and she sit lovingly alone.
I know too well the devilish art he works
And how his guilty passion shapes itself.
I follow him through every twist and turn
By which he wormed himself into my heart;
I hear him breathing to the guilty girl
The fond familiar nothings of our love;
I hear him whispering into her ear
The tenderness that he rehearsed on me.
I follow him through all his well-known moods --
Now fierce and passionate, now fanciful;
And ever tuning his accursed tongue
To chime in with the passion at her heart.
Oh, never fear that I shall starve the flame!
When jealousy takes shelter in my heart
It does not die for lack of sustenance!" (2)

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(1) Gilbert, W. S.: Pygmalion and Galatea, Act II, lines 34-75
(2) Ibid., Act III, lines 54-72

Gilbert's "puckish humor and fancy" are far better suited to the background of Sir Arthur Sullivan's music than to that of his own blank verse. Sullivan provided him with a musical accompaniment as sprightly and as piquant as his own delightful fancy. Together they are irresistible in such rollicking creations as "Pinafore," "The Mikado," "Iolanthe," and "The Pirates of Penzance." These operas will preserve Gilbert's name in the theater long after his poetical dramas are forgotten. Half the honors, of course, must be given to Sir Arthur Sullivan, whose genius as a composer built the delightful musical framework for the charming fun and frolic.

The opera "Pinafore" is still a delight, while the blank verse dramas are forgotten. At its original presentation, "Pinafore" made a record run of seven hundred continuous performances; and "The Mikado," produced at the Savoy on March 14, 1885, ran for six hundred seventy-two continuous performances. "Pygmalion and Galatea's" success in 1883 of one hundred two continuous performances is small in comparison. Gilbert's success in the poetic play, though falling far short of the success gained by his operas, was much greater than that earned by most of the men who tried to restore the poetic drama to the stage of the nineteenth century.

W. G. WILLS

W. G. Wills (1828 - 1891) was an Irish dramatist, journalist, and portrait painter. From 1872 on, he brought out a number of plays at the Lyceum Theater, providing Henry Irving with several popular roles. Wills tried, in some of his plays, to revive the Gothic school of terror and the melodrama made popular by Kotzebue. In collaboration with Mr. Vezin, who translated the German originals or "bases," Wills brought out some adaptations for the London stage.

His tragedy "Charles the First" was first produced at the Lyceum on September 28, 1872, with Henry Irving most successfully playing the title role. Buchanan, a fellow playwright and critic, says that the success of the play was due chiefly to the "easy grace and truly natural manner of Irving." (1)

William Archer says of Wills:

"His is one of those self-contradictory talents which seem made for definition in rhymed paradoxes. He is so strong and so weak, so manly and so puerile, so poetic and so commonplace, so careful and so slovenly, that one hesitates whether to regard him as the greatest or the worst of modern dramatists. In truth, he is neither. He is a man of poetic and artistic temperament, with occasional moments of dramatic inspiration. Unfortunately he does not always wait for these moments to take up his pen, and, when he writes without inspiration,

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(1) Buchanan, Robert: A Look Round Literature, chapter entitled The Modern Stage, page 251

his deficient taste and lack of genuine dramatic instinct betray him into deplorable solecisms. He is an exception in the dramatic life of the day, or rather, as it were, a freak of nature. He does not, to any extent, share the faults and tendencies of the reigning school, but still less can he be regarded as in advance of it, or in any sense the precursor of better things.

"The secret of his limitations, perhaps, lies in the fact that he requires to be inspired by his material. He now and then chances on a fine situation and works it out dramatically, but he must find his situation ready made. He has not the skill to extract the dramatic possibilities which lurk in a given theme. They must lie on the surface, or he will miss them. Idyllic work is his forte. Here the vein of poetry, which he certainly possesses and is sometimes inclined to overwork, stands him in good stead. In grappling with a really serious situation his strength too often fails him." (1)

In his tragedy Wills gives us a most sympathetic character study of the unfortunate Charles Stuart. He pictures him a noble courtly gentleman, the victim of a coil of circumstances which he has not the political acumen to disentangle. We see him as a loving husband and father, as a sovereign considerate of the happiness of his people, as a Stuart ready to die in defense of the sacred rights invested in his royal anointed person. Cromwell, Wills represents as a smug hypocrite:

"A mouthing patriot with an itching palm,
In one hand menace, in the other greed."

The play opens at Hampton Court where we see King Charles in the bosom of his family, enjoying the companionship and love of his wife and children. Rumblings

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(1) Archer: English Dramatists of Today, page 360

of the Puritan revolt come to our ears from time to time and the King's attempt to cope with this hostility reveals him as well-meaning but feeble and ineffective. With his kingdom in open rebellion, with his French queen insulted openly in the streets of London, he tells fairy tales to his little children, and basks in the peace of Hampton:

"QUEEN. At rest! Non, non! Some dreadful
thing has happened.
This morning, as my coach passed Westminster,
The people -- those who only yester-week
Did greet me with the hearty English cheer,
Now, as I passed, cried 'Papist! Jesuit!'
Ah! I had less of terror than of grief.
What have I done? All London is in riot!
KING. Nay, look around. There is not
riot here.
'The mack'rel clouds that float above us, wage
Their mute and mimic battles on the blue;
No fever in the pulse of old Thames;
Wholesome and sweet the breezes, like wise councils,'
A wondrous peace walks through the leafy chasms
Of Hampton groves. Nature and we alike
Keep peaceful holiday." (1)

Act II shows us England in the throes of civil war. Cromwell is introduced and, in his interview with Charles, brands himself as a hypocrite and a scoundrel, willing to sell his country for a title of nobility. Charles with true royal dignity scorns any compromise with such baseness:

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(1) Wills, W. G.: Charles the First, Act I, Scene 1

"KING. And hast thou borne till now so
bold a front
And look'd me in the face, this in thy heart?
So, the demands and troubles of the people
Before they reach me filter through a medium
Both faithless and corrupt.
Send me some fearless honourable man,
And let him tell me all the round of wrongs
My people suffer. I will take that scroll
And place it on the altar of my memory,
Till with a bounteous will all be redress'd.
But for this false concoction of pure malice,
Brought to me here by such a messenger --
Thee, who dost truckle for the wealth and title
Which you denounce so roundly from the hustings --
A mouthing patriot with an itching palm;
In one hand menace, in the other greed --
For such a lie its proper place is there.
There is a trust placed in my hands by God;
I will not barter it to hirelings!"

Wills's picture of Cromwell has been the subject of much discussion. Naturally, admirers of Cromwell, among which class William Archer takes his stand most emphatically, object to their hero's being represented as a greedy, traitorous hypocrite. On the other hand, people like Wills himself, whose sympathies are all with the martyr king, are glad to see Charles portrayed with so much sympathy and feeling.

The third and fourth acts are remarkably well done. The dramatist's material comes to his aid here, for few can look upon Charles Stuart go through those last days of mental and physical anguish without being emotionally affected. Wills tells very well the heroic

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(1) Wills, W. G.: Charles the First, Act II, Scene 1

tale of the calm courage and quiet dignity with which Charles went to his fate -- "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it."

Wills was evidently inspired by his subject. There is an unmistakable sincerity about the characterization of the king which appeals to us and forestalls dullness even in the most commonplace portions of the play. The blank verse is of the endstopped variety, and in the longer speeches tends to become declamative and wearisome. The King's farewell to the Queen is an example of the dramatist's failure to express himself in impassioned dramatic form:

"KING. Oh, my loved solace on my thorny road,
Sweet clue in all my labyrinth of sorrow,
What shall I leave to thee?
To thee I do consign my memory!
Oh, banish not my name from off thy lips
Because it pains awhile in naming it.
Harsh grief doth pass in time into far music:
Red-eyed Regret that waiteth on thy steps
Will daily grow a gentle, dear companion,
And hold sweet converse with thee of thy dead.
I fear me I may sometime fade from thee,
That when the heart expelleth gray-stoled grief
I live no longer in thy memory;
Oh! keep my place in it for ever green,
All hung with the immortelles of thy love,
That sweet abiding in thine inner thought
I long for more than sculptured monument
Or proudest record 'mong the tombs of kings."

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(1) Wills, W. G.: Charles the First, Act V

CLOSET DRAMA

As prose gradually took possession of the Victorian stage, more and more poets turned to the unacted play as their medium of dramatic expression. The list of plays written with no thought of an actual theater or an actual audience is very long, indeed. Practically all of these closet dramas remain true to the romantic traditions, shunning the contemporary problems which were of so much interest to the prose dramatist of the day.

The Elizabethan spirit is plainly to be seen in George Darley, whose lyrical fairy pastoral, "Sylvia," is reminiscent of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream"; and in Charles Jeremiah Wills and his ardent admirer Wade, both disciples of Christopher Marlowe. Miss Isabella Harwood, the daughter of the second editor of the "Saturday Review," wrote under the pseudonym of Ross Neil a series of closet dramas containing some really fine poetry.

Other writers who gained distinction in the field of the closet drama are: Henry (or Hengist) Horne; Miss Mitford; Sarah Flower Adams; Fanny Kemble*, a grandniece

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* Fanny Kemble had one play, Francis I. produced when she was seventeen years old. It ran for several nights in March 1832. Arthur Hallam's criticism is most complimentary: "It is a remarkable production for seventeen; the language is very pure, free, elegant English and strictly dramatic. There is none of that verbiage which is called mere poetry in it. She must have nourished her childhood with the strong wine of our old drama."

of the famous Mrs. Siddons and herself a successful actress; Matthew Arnold, who wrote after the Greek classical form; John Byrne, Leicester Warren, Augusta Webster, and Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose dramas written after the classical and Elizabethan models form a genuine contribution to English poetry. Hugh Walker says of Swinburn's classical drama "Atalanta in Calydon" (1865) that it was "the greatest in the classical form since 'Samson Agonistes'" and at once established him "as one of the chief poets of the age." Swinburne clearly avows his intention of trying to reincarnate the Elizabethan genius. Unfortunately, he did not, like Beddoes, possess the Elizabethan nature, nor did he, like Bulwer-Lytton, have a flair for the theatrically effective. Hence his contribution was not to the theater.

No other age in English literature is as rich in closet drama as the nineteenth century, during both the Georgian and the Victorian periods. These unacted plays reflect the same faults that mar the more virile stage productions. Walker says:

> "In all these tragedies, whether acted or not, and whether works of genius or not, certain resemblances have been noted. They exhibit most of the elements that characterize the romantic movement as it stirred English poetry from the 'Lyrical Ballads' to the first publications of Tennyson and Browning. Without realism in plot or language, and dealing always with what is unusual, improbable, and removed from the present, they made little effort to catch the interest of the average audience or to excite an interest common to ordinary experience.

Their reaction against the frivolity of contemporary melodrama was as decided as their reaction against eighteenth century conventionality; but not to drama. They did not succeed in working out cause and effect of character through incident; when they desired to gain stage effectiveness, they merely borrowed from current melodrama or from the Elizabethans." (1)

It is a significant fact that all the great dramatists have been popular in their own day. No great playwright ever had to wait for future generations to recognize his worth. We hear of poets starving in garrets, of musicians lying in nameless graves, of philosophers accorded the position of fools, but this has never been the fate of the playwright. If he is recognized at all, it is by his own generation; if he ever finds an audience, it is in the theater of his own day. Shakespeare was the idol of the Elizabethan playgoers and died a wealthy man. It was the applause that drowned the Globe Theater with its din that swept him to his high pinnacle of fame. Without its inspiration, he would never have been spurred on from play to play. Perhaps this is the reason that the first night of a play provides such a thrill to the whole theatrical world. No one can predict with absolute surety how a play will be received, and the first night of a great play in New York, London, or Paris is an exciting occasion for playwright, producer, actors, and critics. They all

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(1) Walker, Hugh: The Literature of the Victorian Era

bow before the supreme and final judge -- the audience in front of the footlights.

All the great dramatists have seemed to feel this close kinship with their own day and generation. They did not feel that they were writing for posterity, but for an actual audience of their fellow countrymen. When their play had pleased and delighted the poeple for whom it was written, it had performed its mission. What became of it after that, did not trouble them. Aeschylus had inscribed over his tomb an epitaph, which it is said he composed himself, mentioning the fact that he fought at Marathon, but saying nothing about his glorious work as a playwright. This humility reminds us of Shakespeare. When Shakespeare made his will, he mentioned even the least of his possessions. He gave away his rings to his friends; he gave his second best feather-bed to his wife; but he never mentioned one word of his thirty-seven immortal plays. As far as he was concerned, they might cease to exist -- they had performed the mission for which he had created them.

According to Cardinal Newman every great writer is "the man of his age, the type of a generation, or the interpreter of a crisis. He is made for his day, and his day for him. The world he lived in made him and used him."

Although, as Newman says, this is true of every writer who gives us a true interpretation of life, it is particularly true of Shakespeare. Elizabethan England made him, and he as truly reflected his age as Dante expressed the spirit of mediaeval Italy or Homer of heroic Greece. The magnificent vitality of the age in which he "lived and moved and had his being" was his; it surges like a sea through all that comes from his pen. The very dramatic form that he used was the supreme literary achievement of the Elizabethan era. The richness and fulness of his imagination, the depth of his emotions, his keen ability to enjoy and delight in the beautiful, his quivering sensibility to the motives which lie behind human conduct -- all these were fed, invigorated, and deepened by the glorious times that swirled about him. What an age for drama; what an inspiration in such an age for a dramatist! Hamlet says that the drama is "the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure." Of no time in the history of the drama is this more true than of the Elizabethan Age. It boasts of forty dramatists, ten of superior rank, and one among the supreme artists of the world who have used the drama as a vehicle of expression. In the Elizabethan Age, second-rate poets became first-rate dramatists; in the nineteenth century, first-

rate poets became second-rate dramatists, content, too many of them, to write the unacted play. Remote and detached from the theater of their day, they left the interpretation of the particular complexion of their age to the more humble prose product of realism -- at that time gradually making a place for itself both on the stage and in the good-will of the people.

BULWER-LYTTON, BROWNING, TENNYSON

THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE POET-DRAMATISTS OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

From the many poet-dramatists of the Victorian Age I have selected three, most representative of their age, for a minute critical study: Bulwer-Lytton, Browning, and Tennyson. These three men will serve as illustrations of the best that romanticism had to offer to the Victorian stage. The plays of Browning and Tennyson were far from satisfactory when brought into the theater and played before an actual audience; Bulwer achieved notable success when brought to the acid test of actual production. Compared with his contemporaries, the success of Bulwer's "Richelieu" is outstanding; it has been rivaled, in modern time, only by Stephen Phillips's "Paola and Francesca." But Phillips's play, the first of his poetical pieces, was not acted until 1901, which puts him into the literary history of the twentieth century, out of the reach of our present critical study. Although an examination of his dramatic work does not belong here, it is interesting to note that Phillips never again achieved the success that was his in "Paolo and Francesca." When that play fell from his pen, the critical world hailed it with joy:

"Suddenly, out of a clear sky, the poetic drama is upon us." But "Ulysses," "The Sin of David," and "Nero" fail to justify the promise of his first play. He did not establish his right to be called a great English dramatist. He certainly had not the technical skill of his contemporaries Pinero, Jones, or Wilde, men whose prose plays still hold the stage. Nevertheless, as long as "Paolo and Francesca" can be revived as beautifully as it was recently with Jane Cowl, Philip Merivale, and Sir Guy Standing in the leading roles, Stephen Phillips will not be forgotten.

The dramatic deficiencies of Browning, Tennyson, and Bulwer-Lytton are typical of those exemplified by the minor Victorian poet dramatists whom we have just reviewed. If we were listing the best creative work of Browning or Tennyson, we certainly should not include their dramas. It is amazing how many of their commentators either pass over their dramatic work with a brief comment, or omit it altogether from their criticisms. Stopford Brooke does not consider Tennyson's dramatic output worthy even of mention. Although displaying poetic ability of a high order, the dramas of both poets fail to reach the heights of poetic genius which they attained in the realm of sheer poetry. Tennyson's "Queen Mary" is not to be mentioned with his "Idylls of the King"; Browning's "Blot in the 'Scutcheon"

cannot stand comparison with his "Ring in the Book." Bulwer alone achieved a dramatic success equal to his excellence in other fields. As many people know "Richelieu" as "The Last Days of Pompeii." Indeed, it is a standing joke of the theater that many people think "Richelieu" written by Shakespeare, it is so often included with a repertoire of his plays.

"Queen Mary," "Harold," "The Druses," "Strafford" -- all are symbols of a life and times that have passed away. Their dramatic shadows are pale ghosts that fail to awaken any emotion within us. Their problems are abstract and intellectual, and imply a forgetfulness of their own age with all its cares, hopes, and ideals. We can identify ourselves with hardly a single hero of this romantic poetic drama; hardly one expresses himself as a fellow-human, suffering under the cares and afflictions that beset ordinary men. We find in these plays none of those beautiful expressions of sympathy with all the common interests of human life in which Shakespeare is so abundant.

In all three of the poets chosen for study, we find the same long didactic and reflective passages that retarded the tempo of the minor dramatists. Endless episodes, especially in the historical plays of Tennyson,

clog the action and impair the artistic unity of the tragedy as a whole. All this, as I have said before, is in strong contrast with the rushing tempo of the melodrama on the stage of the day.

Too often, in Browning as in Talfourd, is philosophy called in to aid the poet in the expression of his thoughts. Abstract philosophy has no place in the drama. A poet can hardly recede further from the stage than when he fails to make himself immediately intelligible to his audience. To mingle reflective writing with dramatic dialogue is a task for a great artist; the attempt among the romanticists led inevitably to failure.

Today, the plays of Browning and Tennyson make excellent reading. We admire them -- but we are not inspired nor profoundly moved by them. Beautiful as the philosophical and poetical garb that clothes these plays often is, they fail to impress us as living, breathing forces. We can never forget that they are imitative and retrogressive. The work of these poets proves that the only one capable of writing drama is a dramatist endowed with the instinct for the theater. The instinct for the theater will not, by itself, make a great dramatist of a man, but without it no one can become a dramatist at all.

Certain it is that neither Browning nor Tennyson possessed such a flair. Possessing every advantage that genius could give, they were yet utterly unable to write plays of enduring worth. It would seem logical to conclude that a man who has created no great character, and who has nowhere displayed any power of reproducing rapid action was not meant by nature to be a dramatist. Certainly, then, these poets, with the exception of Bulwer-Lytton, were mistaken in believing themselves called to the theater. No public, either in their own day or since, has ever justified this opinion. When the sum total of their blemishes is taken, there arises the disheartening conclusion that the Victorian poet-dramatists, possessing but a minor gift in the theater, tried without equipment to go beyond it. They were the hope rather than the realization of the romanticists' desire for the re-appearance in the English theater of the poetic glory of the "spacious days."

Personally, my "acid test" for a play agrees with the one William Lyon Phelps gives as his dramatic touchstone:

> "As I look back on fifty years as a theatergoer, the sky-line of memory is like a panorama of mountains. There are many individual peaks that tower above the range. These 'high spots' are the moments when either a thrilling situation in a play, or a thrilling display of art by an actor, or both together, gave me a sensation not only overwhelming at the time, but made an impression

so indelible that I can recreate it whenever I will.

"I have only one test for the play and the actors; it is the force of impact. How strong and how lasting is the effect? Or, if you like, I can state it in physical terms. I recognize greatness in the theater, in music, in poetry, by only one criterion. It is the spinal chill.

"The difference between a great poem and a good poem is that the former has transporting power. We are literally carried away. Unless a poem or a piece of music or a scene in a play or an actor or a singer can do that for me, I will not use the word 'genius.'" (1)

Using the "force of impact" as a criterion, there were, with the sole exception of Bulwer-Lytton, no geniuses in the Victorian poetic drama. Certainly neither Browning nor Tennyson can make any claim to such an honor. They failed to make their dramas an interpretation of the age that produced them, a poetic embodiment of the prevailing "Zeitgeist." From no play of the age, with the exception of "Richelieu," do we go out as from an experience deeper than real life ever brings to most men -- or often brings to any man!

In a detailed study of the plays of these three poet-dramatists, we can see very plainly just where they failed to take cognizance of those basic dramatic essentials so vital to success in the theater.

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(1) Phelps, William Lyon: Supreme Moments in the Theater (Delineator, September, 1931)

A CRITICISM OF THE POETICAL DRAMA OF ROBERT BROWNING

Browning is one of the poet-dramatists of the nineteenth century who tried most assiduously to earn renown upon the stage of his own day. That his failure to do so nettled him may be deduced from the fact that he was ever trying to ascribe his lack of success in this direction to the faulty production of his plays, to their bad management, to second-rate actors, in fact to anything but to the poor construction of the dramas themselves.

His career as a dramatist falls within the years 1837 and 1845, eight years. Seven plays followed one another in quick succession, that is seven intentionally excluding "Pippa Passes" and "In a Balcony," which are dramatic dialogue and not drama proper. All seven plays belong to an early period in his career. Only three were ever brought out on the stage.

"Strafford", 1837
"King Victor and King Charles", 1842
"The Return of the Druses", 1843
"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon", 1843
"Colombe's Birthday", 1843
"Luria", 1845
"A Soul's Tragedy", 1845

The three produced were:

"Strafford"
"Colombe's Birthday"
"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon"

As a dramatist Browning draws from the critics a diversity of opinion. Browning partisans are very apt to regard their poet as sacro-sanct, and they refuse to admit the ineffectualness of his plays in the theater, either of his own day or of ours. The fact remains, however, that great actors like the late Sir Herbert Tree or the present portrayer of character, Walter Hampden, do not include "Strafford" in their revivals, although they delight still in playing "Richelieu" to capacity houses. In fact, the only piece of Browning's to be a success in the theater was not intended by him as a drama at all. I mean, of course, "Caponsacchi," the dramatized story of "The Ring and the Book," played so successfully in 1930 by Hampden, and maintained as a permanent part of his repertoire. The question, then, that concerns us is: Why was Browning, as a playwright, not a success in the theater?

In the drama of the late nineteenth century there can be distinguished, according to Vaughan in his study of tragedy, two main tendencies, tendencies which became even more clearly defined as the twentieth century wore on. The first was a definite leaning toward romance and a pronounced, even extreme, idealism. The second was, for the first time in the history of tragedy, an equally marked feeling for realism. Browning illustrates most fully the feeling for romance; while realism, with a few exceptions, is best seen in the plays of Ibsen.

Browning's Inward Tendency

There is in Browning, says Vaughan, a tendency "to drive the dramatic motive still further inward, to make it still more immaterial, still more subtle than it had ever been before." He goes on to say:

"In Browning perhaps the first thing to strike us is the marked stress laid on the situation, and the peculiar way in which the situation is handled. The situation is no longer the scene of a particular, definite train of outward incidents or circumstances; nor does it lead, as it led in earlier dramatists, to a particular, definite issue in outward action. It is created, so to speak, from within; by the particular temperament, the unconscious, impalpable instincts, of a given group of characters. It is a far more intangible thing in its texture, and far more fleeting in its duration. It is a matter not of years, or months, or weeks, as it is with Shakespeare; but of a day, an hour, even a moment -- as in 'Luria,' and 'In a Balcony,' and 'Pippa Passes.' It is a light suddenly flashed upon the soul, and then, as suddenly, withdrawn.

"And this peculiarity in the handling of the situation leads to a peculiarity no less marked in the presentation of character. Character is no longer regarded as something fixed and stable. It would not even be enough to say that it is presented in growth. It is rather in flux that Browning conceives of it, and paints it; as changing with each change of the situation; as unfolding to an utterly new life at the call of some strange experience which confronts it. We may compare it to a stream which reflects the ever-changing aspect of the banks on each side of it, and of the sky above it; or to some tropical plant leaping upwards to meet the light that pours through an opening in the forest roof which overhangs it. The situation is the crucial moment which tests character to the uttermost, which reveals qualities hitherto unknown and unsuspected, which brings to the surface strains that might otherwise have been permanently choked." (1)

To a marked degree, then, we see in Browning this

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(1) Vaughan, C. E.: Types of Tragic Drama, Chapter XI

tendency to delve into the mind for the hidden springs of human conduct; indeed, to search past the mind, into the very soul of the individual

> "To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self
> His quick sense looks: he crowns and calls aright
> The soul o' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act,
> Takes flesh i' the world, and clothes itself a
> king." (1)

"The dramatic poet," says Symons, "in the ordinary sense, in the sense in which we apply it to Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, aims at showing, by means of action, the development of character as it manifests itself to the world in deeds. His study is character, but it is character in action, considered only in connection with a particular grouping of events, and only so far as it produces or operates upon these. The processes are concealed from us, we see the result. In the very highest realizations of this dramatic power, and always in intention, we are presented with a perfect picture, in which every actor lives, and every word is audible; perfect, complete in itself, without explanation, without comment; a dogma incarnate, which we must accept as it is given us, and explain and illustrate for ourselves. If we wish to know what this character or that thought or felt in his very soul, we may perhaps have data from which to construct a more or less probable hypothesis; but that is all. We are told nothing, we care to know nothing of what is going on in the thought; of the infinitely subtle meshes of motive or emotion which will perhaps find no direct outcome in speech, no direct manifestation in action, but by which the soul's life in reality subsists. This is not the intention: it is a spectacle of life we are beholding; and life is action." (2)

But it is just in these "infinitely subtle meshes" of the workings of the soul that Browning finds his dramatic material.

In Browning, says Dowden, "those moments stand emi-

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(1) Browning, Robert: Luria, Act III
(2) Symons, Arthur: An Introduction to the Study of Browning, page 4-5

nent in life in which the spirit has struggled victoriously in the cause of conscience against impulse and desire. With Mr. Browning the moments are most glorious in which the obscure tendency of many years has been revealed by the lightning of sudden passion, or in which a resolution that changes the current of life has been taken in reliance upon that insight which vivid emotion bestows; and those periods of our history are charged most fully with moral purpose which take their direction from moments such as these. We cannot always burn with ecstasy, we cannot always retain the vision. Our own languors and lethargy spread a mist over the soul, or the world with its prudential motives and sage provisoes, and chicane of counsels of moderation, tempts us to distrust the voice of every transcendent passion. But even in the hour of faithlessness, if we can cling blindly to the facts revealed in the vanished moment of inspiration we shall be saved." (1)

The drama of Browning, Arthur Symons sees as a drama of the interior, a tragedy or comedy of the soul. "Instead of a grouping of characters which shall act on one another to produce a certain result in action, we have a grouping of events useful or important only as they influence the character or the mind. This is very clearly explained in the original advertisement to 'Paracelsus,' where Browning tells us that his poem is an attempt to 'reverse the method usually adopted by writers whose aim it is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions, by the operation of persons and events; and that, instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded.'

"In this way, by making the soul the center of action, he is enabled (thinking himself into it, as all dramatists must do) to bring out its characteristics, to reveal its very nature. Suppose him to be attracted by some particular act. The problem occupies him: the more abstruse and entangled the more attractive to him it is; he winds his way into the heart of it, or, we might better say, he picks to pieces the machinery. Presently he begins to reconstruct, before our eyes, the whole series of events, the whole substance of the soul, but, so to speak, turned in-

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(1) Dowden, Edward: Studies in Literature, pages 228-229

side out. We watch the workings of the mental machinery as it is slowly disclosed before us; we note the specialties of construction, its individual character, the interaction of parts, every secret of it. We thus come to see that, considered from the proper point of view, everything is clear, regular and explicable in however entangled an action, however obscure a soul; we see that what is external is perfectly natural when we can view its evolution from what is internal. . . Browning's aim, then, being to see how each soul conceives of itself, and to exhibit its essential qualities, yet without complication of incident, it is his frequent practice to reveal the soul to itself by the application of a sudden test, which shall condense the long trial of years into a single moment, and so 'flash the truth out by one blow.' To this practice we owe his most vivid and notable work. 'The poetry of Robert Browning,' says Pater, 'is pre-eminently the poetry of situations.' He selects a character, no matter how uninteresting in itself, and places it in some situation where its vital essence may become apparent in some crisis of conflict or opportunity. The choice of good or evil is open to it, and in perhaps a single moment its fate will be decided. When a soul plays dice with the devil there is only a second in which to win or lose; but the second may be worth an eternity. These moments of intense significance, these tremendous spiritual crises, are struck out in Browning's poetry with a clearness and sharpness of outline that no other poet has achieved.

"There are for him but two realities and but two subjects, Life and Thought. On these are expended all his imagination and all his intellect, more consistently and in a higher degree than can be said of any English poet since the age of Elizabeth. Life and thought, the dramatic and the metaphysical, are not considered apart, but woven into one seamless tissue; and in regard to both he has one point of view and one manner of treatment. It is this that causes the unity which subsists throughout his works, and it is this, too, which distinguishes him among poets, and makes that originality by virtue of which he has been described as the most striking figure in our poetic literature." (1)

We have an excellent concrete example of this consensus of opinion in regard to Browning's method of approach

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(1) Symons, Arthur: An Introduction to the Study of Browning, page 6-7

in his poetic drama "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." In this play, Mertoun is but a gracious, loving, rather commonplace youth until Tresham's sword thrust brings him to the brink of death. In the one moment that he hovers there, what a change takes place in his soul! As he fades physically, he grows to a superman's proportions spiritually. The vibrant boy, but a moment before so keenly alive to all that life has to offer, now welcomes death as a release from a world of heartless men, a world that cannot see "through the troubled surface of his crime" to the "depth of purity immovable" that ever abided beneath. His sin expiated, the true values of life in an instant divined, he goes willingly down "the bloody slope of death." His last words to his beloved Mildred are those of a soul, aged an eternity of wisdom in a moment of time.

In these lines, quoted from the death scene of the play, we can see the sudden awakening of Mertoun's soul; and the unsuspected sweetness, strength, and nobility which springs from the anguish of his young spirit.

"MERTOUN. You'll hear me now!
TRESHAM. But rise!
MERTOUN. Ah! Tresham, say I not 'you'll hear me now?'
And what procures a man the right to speak
In his defence before his fellow-man,
But -- I suppose -- the thought that presently
He may have leave to speak before his God
His whole defence?
TRESHAM. Not hurt? It cannot be!
You made no effort to resist me. Where
Did my sword reach you? Why not have returned
My thrusts? Hurt where?
MERTOUN. My lord --
TRESHAM. How young he is!

MERTOUN. Lord Tresham, I am very young, and yet
I have entangled other lives with mine.
Do let me speak, and do believe my speech!
That when I die before you presently --
TRESHAM. Can you stay here till I return with help?
MERTOUN. Oh! stay by me! When I was less than boy
I did you grievous wrong and knew it not --
Upon my honor, knew it not! Once known,
I could not find what seemed a better way
To right you than I took: my life -- you feel
How less than nothing were the giving you
The life you've taken! But I thought my way
The better -- only for your sake and hers:
And as you have decided otherwise,
Would I had an infinity of lives
To offer you! Now say -- instruct me -- think
Can you from the brief minutes I have left
Eke out my reparation? Oh! think -- think!
For I must wring a partial -- dare I say,
Forgiveness from you, ere I die?
TRESHAM. I do
Forgive you.
MERTOUN. Wait and ponder that great word!
Because, if you forgive me, I shall hope
To speak to you of -- Mildred!
TRESHAM. Mertoun, haste
And anger have undone us. 'Tis not you
Should tell me for a novelty you're young,
Thoughtless, unable to recall the past.
Be but your pardon ample as my own!
MERTOUN. Ah! Tresham, that a sword-stroke and a drop
Of blood or two should bring all this about!
Why, 't was my very fear of you, my love
Of you -- what passion like a boy's for one
Like you. -- that ruined me! I dreamed of you --
You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
The scholar and the gentleman. I burned
To knit myself to you; but I was young,
And your surpassing reputation kept me
So far aloof! Oh! wherefore all that love?
With less of love, my glorious yesterday
Of praise and gentlest words and kindest looks
Had taken place perchance six months ago.
Even now, how happy we had been!And yet
I know the thought of this escaped you, Tresham!
Let me look up into your face; I feel
'Tis changed above me: yet my eyes are glazed.
Where? where?
[As he endeavors to raise himself, his eye catches the lamp.]
Ah, Mildred! What will Mildred do?

Tresham, her life is bound up in the life
That's bleeding fast away! I'll live -- must live --
There, if you'll only turn me I shall live
And save her! Tresham -- oh! had you but heard!
Had you but heard! What right was yours to set
The thoughtless foot upon her life and mine,
And then say, as we perish, 'Had I thought,
All had gone otherwise?' We've sinned and die:
Never you sin, Lord Tresham! for you'll die,
And God will judge you.
TRESHAM. Yes, be satisfied!
That process is begun.
MERTOUN. And she sits there
Waiting for me! Now, say you this to her --
You, not another -- say, I saw him die
As he breathed this, 'I love her' -- you don't know
What those three small words mean! Say, loving her
Lowers me down the bloody slope to death
With memories -- I speak to her, not you,
Who had no pity, will have no remorse,
Perchance intend her -- Die along with me,
Dear Mildred! 'tis so easy, and you'll 'scape
So, much unkindness! Can I lie at rest,
With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds
Done to you? -- heartless men shall have my heart,
And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,
Aware, perhaps, of every blow -- O God! --
Upon those lips -- yet of no power to tear
The felon stripe by stripe! Die, Mildred! Leave
Their honorable world to them! For God
We're good enough, though the world casts us out." (1)

No less are we moved at Tresham's sudden and intense remorse. In the instant that his hate strikes and kills, he divines the truth, and a revulsion of passion occurs within him.

"TRESHAM. Had I but heard him -- had I let him speak
Half the truth -- less -- had I looked long on him
I had desisted! Why, as he lay there,
The moon on his flushed cheek, I gathered all
The story ere he told it; I saw through
The troubled surface of his crime and yours
A depth of purity immovable.

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act III, Sc. 1

Had I but glanced, where all seemed turbidest
Had gleamed some inlet to the calm beneath.
I would not glance: my punishment's at hand." (1)

Through the regenerating power of repentance, both these men have been spiritually awakened. Hiram Corson discusses at some length Browning's use of repentance as a means of revitalizing the human soul. He writes:

"The poetry of Browning everywhere says this, and says it more emphatically than that of any other poet in our literature.It says everywhere, that not through knowledge, not through a sharpened intellect, but through repentance, in the deeper sense to which I have just alluded, through conversion, through wheeling into a new center its spiritual system, the soul attains to saving truth. Salvation with him means that revelation of the soul to itself, that awakening quickening, actuating, attitude-adjusting, of the soul, which sets it gravitating toward the Divine."(2)

This idea of conversion is most forcibly set forth by the Pope in "The Ring and the Book" when he finally decides to sign the death-warrant of Guido and his accomplices. He says:

"For the main criminal I have no hope except in such a suddenness of fate. I stood at Naples once, a night so dark I could have scarce conjectured there was earth anywhere, sky or sea or world at all: but the night's black was burst through by a blaze -- thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore, through her whole length of mountain visible; there lay the city thick and plain with spires, and, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea. So may the truth be flashed out by one blow, and Guido see, one instant, and be saved."(3)

We find this idea of suddenly being born anew in all of Browning's works. In the poem "Cristina" he seems to

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act III, Sc.II
(2)Corson, Hiram: An Introduction to the Study of Browning
(3)Browning, Robert: The Ring and the Book

explain his own theory:

"Oh we're sunk enough here, God knows! but not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us, when the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones, and apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way, to its triumph or undoing.

There are flashes struck from midnights, there are fire-flames noon-days kindle,
Whereby piled-up honors perish, whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse, which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a life-time that away the rest have trifled."

Influence of Macready

That Browning adopted the dramatic form at all as a vehicle of expression was a matter of accident rather than design. "Strafford," the first of his dramas, was written, indirectly, to be sure, at the request of Macready. It is interesting to note here that, although he began to write dramas impulsively, he abandoned the form with deliberation and decisiveness. In his dedication of "Luria" to Walter Savage Landor, he says:

"I dedicate this last attempt for the present at dramatic poetry to a great dramatic poet."

Browning first came to the notice of Macready at the publication of his long poem "Paracelsus" in 1835, when he was twenty-two years old. "Paracelsus" was the first of a long series of studies in character, in the handling of which Browning was to exhibit a peculiar genius. One of the most remarkable things about this fine poem is the

highly intellectual character of the hero. With misgivings we see the loftiness of his aims and his aspirations for a success too great for mortal to achieve. The entry in Macready's diary for December 7, 1835 reads as follows:

> "Read 'Paracelsus,' a work of great daring, starred with poetry of thought, feeling, and diction, but occasionally obscure: the writer can scarcely fail to be a leading spirit of his time." (1)

On December 31, twenty-four days later, he writes:

> "Frederick Reynolds arrived a little after 4 o'clock. Busied myself with 'house affairs.' Our other guests were Miss Kenney, Forster, Cattermole, Browning, and Mr. Munro. Mr. Browning was very popular with the whole party; his simple and enthusiastic manner engaged attention and won opinions from all present; he looks and speaks more like a youthful poet than any man I ever saw." (2)

Naturally, Macready always had his weather eye open for strong characterizations, and "Paracelsus" appealed to him forcibly. Although it was not a drama, he felt that the poet who had created such a powerful personality could write a heroic tragedy.

"Paracelsus"

In "Paracelsus" we have the stuff of which a great tragedy is made. A brief consideration of the conflict involved shows us the truth of this. Paracelsus is kith and kin of Goethe's Faust. After years of study and thought, he realizes that life holds something more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. With the realization of all the finer things that life has to offer, missed in his narrow lust for knowledge, comes the despondency which per-

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(1) Macready, William: Reminiscences
(2) Ibid.

vades those to whom life has not brought the satisfaction of attainment. He has striven after "wandering fires" and now, like Arthur's knights, is "lost in the quagmire." Cui bono? The old cry of the centuries goes up from the weary soul of Paracelsus -- the same cry that has come down through the ages from Aeschylus to O'Neill. Is this all? Is this the consummation devoutly to be wish'd?

At the height of his apparent success, acclaimed by his world, Paracelsus tastes the bitterness of disgust with his life's accomplishment. Miserable as he is within himself, yet to the outside world he embodies the summit of human achievement. He is not in the least blinded by the glitter of his present glory -- but perceives plainly that his hour of degradation is on its way, and confesses the moral failure which foreshadows the coming of the personal one. So Paracelsus learns, by the defeat of his plans and the disappointment of his hopes, that the perfect man is not all head, but that heart is absolutely necessary, too. At least he realizes that there can be no true happiness except that which comes from endeavoring to bring it to other people. The following scene from the poem shows Browning's greatness as a poet while it most clearly indicates what his limitations must be as a dramatist. It is a constant surprise to me that Macready with his sensitivity toward the theatrically effective, did not instinctively realize Browning's inability to use the

theater as a medium.

"FESTUS. No change! The weary night is wellnigh spent,
The lamp burns low, and through the casement-bars
Gray morning glimmers feebly, -- yet no change!
Another night, and still no sigh has stirr'd
That fallen discolor'd mouth, no pang relit
Those fix'd eyes, quench'd by the decaying body
Like torch-flame choked in dust: while all beside
Was breaking to the last they held out bright,
As a stronghold where life intrench'd itself;
But they are dead now, -- very blind and dead.
He will drowse into death without a groan!
My Aureole! -- my forgotten, ruin'd Aureole!
The days are gone, -- are gone! How grand thou wert:
And now not one of those who struck thee down --
Poor, glorious spirit -- concerns him even to stay
And satisfy himself his little hand
Could turn God's image to a livid thing.
Another night, and yet no change! 'T'is much
That I should sit by him, and bathe his brow,
And chafe his hands, -- 'tis much; but he will sure
Know me, and look on me, and speak to me
Once more, -- but only once! His hollow cheek
Look'd all night long as though a creeping laugh
At his own state were just about to break
From the dying man; my brain swam, my throat swell'd,
And yet I could not turn away. In truth,
They told me how, when first brought here, he seem'd
Resolved to live, -- to lose no faculty;
Thus striving to keep up his shatter'd strength,
Until they bore him to this stifling cell:
When straight his features fell, -- an hour made white
The flush'd face and relax'd the quivering limb;
Only the eye remain'd intense awhile,
As though it recognised the tomb-like place;
And then he lay as here he lies.
Ay, here!
Here is earth's noblest, nobly garlanded, --
Her bravest champion, with his well-won meed, --
Her best achievement, her sublime amends
For countless generations, fleeting fast
And follow'd by no trace; -- the creature-god
She instances when angels would dispute
The title of her brood to rank with them --
Angels, this is our angel! -- those bright forms
We clothe with purple, crown and call to thrones,
Are human, but not his; those are but men
Whom other men press round and kneel before, --
Those palaces are dwelt in by mankind;

Higher provision is for him you seek
Amid our pomps and glories: see it here!
Behold earth's paragon! Now, raise thee, clay!
God! Thou art Love! I build my faith on that!
Even as I watch beside thy tortured child,
Unconscious whose hot tears fall fast by him,
So doth thy right hand guide us through the world
Wherein we stumble. God! what shall we say?
How has he sinn'd? How else should he have done?
Surely he sought thy praise, -- thy praise, for all
He might be busied by the task so much
As to forget awhile its proper end.
Dost thou well, Lord? Thou canst not but prefer
That I should range myself upon his side, --
How could he stop at every step to set
Thy glory forth? Hadst Thou but granted him
Success, thy honor would have crown'd success,
A halo round a star. Or, say he err'd, --
Save him, dear God; it will be like thee: bathe him
In light and life! Thou art not made like us;
We should be wroth in such a case; but Thou
Forgivest, -- so, forgive, these passionate thoughts,
Which come unsought, and will not pass away!
I know thee, who hast kept my path, and made
Light for me in the darkness, -- tempering sorrow,
So that it reach'd me like a solemn joy:
It were too strange that I should doubt thy love:
But what am I? Thou madest him, and knowest
How he was fashion'd. I could never err
That way: The quiet place beside thy feet,
Reserved for me, was ever in my thoughts;
But he, -- thou shouldst have favor'd him as well!
Ah, he wakes! Aureole, I am here, -- 'tis Festus!
I cast away all wishes save one wish, --
Let him but know me, -- only speak to me!

PAR. Stay, stay with me!

FEST. I will; I am come here
To stay with you, -- Festus, you loved of old;
Festus, you know, you must know!

PAR. Festus, my own friend, you are come at last?
As you say, 'tis an awful enterprise, --
But you believe I shall go through with it:

FEST. How feel you, Aureole?

PAR. Well!
Well: 'tis a strange thing. I am dying, Festus,
And now that fast the storm of life subsides,
I first perceive how great the whirl has been:
I was calm then, who am so dizzy now, --
Calm in the thick of the tempest, but no less
A partner of its motion, and mix'd up

With its career. The hurricane is spent,
And the good boat speeds through the brightening weather
But is it earth or sea that heaves below?
And this is death: I understand it all.
New being waits me; new perceptions must
Be born in me before I plunge therein;
Which last is Death's affair; and, while I speak,
Minute by minute he is filling me
With power; and, while my foot is on the threshold
Of boundless life, -- the doors unopen'd yet,
All preparations not complete within, --
I turn new knowledge upon old events,
And the effect is -- But I must not tell;
It is not lawful. Your own turn will come
One day. Wait, Festus! You will die like me!" (1)

There was no large sale of the poem. If at any time during the nineteenth century the profession of poet deserved Milton's characterization of it as "the homely, slighted shepherd's trade" it was during its fourth decade. The tragedy of "Ion", previously printed for private circulation, had been produced in May, 1836. Largely through Macready's acting, it was a success upon the stage. Browning wrote that, compared with the success of Talfourd's "Ion", his "Paracelsus" had been a dead failure. The critics of the day saw talent in the poem, but condemned it as dreamy and obscure. The "Metropolitan Magazine" said: "There are many touches of beauty, almost Shakespearian, in the work, but the general tone is homely and its contents crude."

"Paracelsus" was not a poem to take the public by storm because it required too much reflection and industrious application. We are interested in it here solely because

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(1) BROWNING, Robert: Paracelsus

it attracted Macready to the young author. The actor writes in his diary:

"November 27th. -- Went from chambers to dine with Rev. William Fox, Bayswater. Met with him Mr. Home, author of 'Cosmo,' Miss Flower, who lives in the house with Mr. Fox, and a little girl, his daughter. I like Mr. Fox very much; he is an original and profound thinker, and most eloquent and ingenious in supporting the penetrating views he takes. Mr. Robert Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus,' came in after dinner; I was very much pleased to meet him. His face is full of intelligence. My time passed most agreeably. Mr. Fox's defence of the suggestion that Lady Macbeth should be a woman of delicate and fragile frame pleased me very much, though he opposed me, and of course triumphantly. I took Mr. Browning on, and requested to be allowed to improve by acquaintance with him. He expressed himself warmly, as gratified by the proposal; wished to send me his book; we exchanged cards and parted."(1)

It is interesting to note that the actor was fully aware of the obscurities in the poet's style, but felt that these were more than atoned for by the poetry of thought, feeling, and diction which pervaded it. We read again in the famous diary:

"December 7th. -- Read 'Paracelsus,' a work of great daring, starred with poetry of thought, feeling, and diction, but occasionally obscure: the writer can scarcely fail to be a leading spirit of his time."(2)

Again Macready wrote:

"April 23rd.-- Resumed that extraordinary poem of 'Paracelsus' after dinner, and, on coming from tea, began to prepare the projected memorial for a license to exercise our calling, and disenthral ourselves from Bunn." (3)

Macready must have read the poem over and over, for later he wrote again of the deep impression that it continued to make upon him: "It raises my wonder the more I

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(1) Macready, William: Reminiscences
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.

read it."

A close friendship evidently sprang up between the actor and the poet. From this time on, up to the estrangement which, in 1843 followed the production of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," a good deal of our knowledge of Browning's dramatic activity comes from references to him in the great actor's diary. The intimacy that sprang up between the two men directed Browning's attention to drama. We can well imagine just how much Macready's urgings had to do with this.

Under the date of February 16, 1836 Macready writes:

"Forster and Browning called, and talked over the plot of a tragedy, which Browning had begun to think of: the subject, Narses. He said that I had bit him by my performance of Othello, and I told him I hoped I should make the blood come. It would indeed be some recompense for the miseries, the humiliations, the heart-sickening disgusts which I have endured in my profession, if by its exercise I had awakened a spirit of poetry whose influence would elevate, ennoble, and adorn our degraded drama. May it be!" (1)

Evidently then, Browning was contemplating as a subject Narses, the famous general of Justinean. Why he gave this up Macready does not say.

On August third of the same year, Macready again writes:

"Forster told me that Browning had fixed on

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(1) Macready, William: Reminiscences

Strafford for the subject of a tragedy; he could not have hit upon one that I could have more readily concurred in." (1)

STRAFFORD

It is altogether probable, in fact it is certain, that Browning's choice of subject was suggested by the aid that he had given to his friend John Forster in the life of Strafford that he was writing. At that time, a series of independent works were coming out under the general title "The Cabinet Cyclopaedia." Forster was to furnish the lives of Eliot and of Strafford in a single volume. He had already completed the life of Eliot which made up the first part of the volume. In the text he had quoted three or four lines from Browning, alluding to him as "a poet whose genius has just risen amongst us." He had made a collection of material for the rest of the volume, and had even begun composition, when he became ill. The book had been promised for a certain date. Naturally Forster was despondent over his failure to fulfill his part of the contract. When he was in this state of mind, Browning visited his friend and generously undertook to finish the work for him. He took the data that Forster had gathered together, and completed the life. In 1836

Macready, William: Reminiscences

the volume containing the two lives appeared but no hint was ever given but that Forster had written it all himself. However, Browning's correspondence with Miss Barrett shows conclusively that this collaboration is a fact. (1)

Browning, once the subject of his drama was settled upon, must have worked at it steadily. Before the close of 1836 he had finished "Strafford" and had given it to Macready, to whom he dedicated the play, also.

Macready was evidently disappointed in the play for he records in his diary of March 19th:

> "Read 'Strafford' in the evening, which I fear is too historical; it is the policy of the man, and its consequences upon him -- not the heart, temper, feelings, that work on this policy, which Browning has portrayed -- and how admirably!" (2)

He must have been too polite to communicate these fears to the author, for on March 30th he writes:

> "I went to the theater soon afterwards, and read to Mr. Osbaldiston the play of 'Strafford'; he caught at it with avidity, agreed to produce it without delay on his part, and to give the author twelve pounds per night for twenty-five nights, and ten pounds per night for ten nights beyond. He also promised to offer Mr. Elton an engagement, to strengthen the play." (3)

On April 28, 1837, before the play had been performed, he sets down in his diary:

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(1) Correspondence of Browning and Miss Barrett; letter of Miss Barrett dated May 26, 1846, Vol.II, page 183, also letter of May 30, page 190, and of June 6, page 284.

(2) Macready, William: Reminiscences, edited by Pollock
(3) Ibid.

"Thought over some scenes of 'Strafford' before I rose, and went out very soon to the rehearsal of it. There is no chance in my opinion for the play but in the acting, which by possibility might carry it to the end without disapprobation; but that the curtain can fall without considerable opposition, I cannot venture to anticipate under the most advantageous circumstances.

"In all the historical plays of Shakespeare, the great poet has only introduced such events as act on the individuals concerned, and of which they are themselves a part; the persons are all in direct relation to each other, and the facts are present to the audience. But in Browning's play we have a long scene of passion -- upon what? A plan destroyed, by whom or for what we know not, and a parliament dissolved, which merely seems to inconvenience Strafford in his arrangements." (1)

Macready's comments here upon the play incidentally bring out very forcibly the fundamental difference between the method adopted by Browning and the method used by Shakespeare when dealing with a similar subject.

As rehearsals of the play went on, Browning evidently saw no weakness in it for Macready writes on May 1, a few days later:

"Called at the box-office about the boxes and places for which I had been applied to. Rehearsed 'Strafford.' Was gratified with the extreme delight Browning testified at the rehearsal of my part, which he said was to him a full recompense for having written the play, inasmuch as he had seen his utmost hopes of character perfectly embodied." (2)

Macready's worst fears were evidently realized. Only acting could save the play, he had thought, and acting did not save it. It went on at Covent Garden May 1, 1837. The character of Strafford was taken by Macready himself, and Lady Carlisle was acted by

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(1) Macready, William: Reminiscences
(2) Ibid.

Helen Faucit. The genius and united effort of those two great interpreters, it might seem, would be sufficient to score a triumph for almost any play. We can imagine what the play would have been without their support. Even with their talent, however, it was far from a success. It was chosen by Macready for his benefit performance, and naturally, that night, Covent Garden saw a full house. Macready seems to have made the most that he could of the part. It was well that Browning was satisfied for no one else but the author had this feeling. The "recompense" that he received from the public was the withdrawal of the play at the end of the fifth performance. Ostensibly the reason for its being taken off the stage was the withdrawal of Vandenhoff, who took the part of Pym. This, however, was just a pretext. Browning enthusiasts, as I have said, will not admit that the play was a failure. Here is the spirited defense put forward by Gosse:

"It is time to deny a statement that has been repeated ad nauseam in every notice that professes to give an account of Mr. Browning's career. Whatever is said or not said, it is always remarked that his plays have 'failed' on the stage. In point of fact, the three plays which he has brought out have all succeeded, and have owed it to fortuitous circumstances that their tenure on the boards has been comparatively short. 'Strafford' was produced when the finances of Covent Garden Theater were at their lowest ebb, and nothing was done to give dignity or splendor to the performance. 'Not a rag for the new tragedy,' said Mr. Osbaldiston. The King was taken by Mr. Dale, who was stone-deaf, and who acted so badly that, as one of the critics said, it

was a pity that the pit did not rise as one man and push him off the stage. All sorts of alterations were made in the text; where the poet spoke of 'grave grey eyes,' the manager corrected it in rehearsal to 'black eyes.' But at last Macready appeared in the second scene of the second act, in more than his wonted majesty, crossing and recrossing the stage like one of Vandyke's courtly personages come to life again, and Miss Helen Faucit threw such tenderness and passion into the part of Lady Carlisle as surpassed all that she had previously displayed of histrionic power. Under these circumstances, and in spite of the dull acting of Vandenhoff, who played Pym without any care or interest, the play was well received on the first night, and on the second night was applauded with enthusiasm by a crowded house. There was every expectation that the tragedy would have no less favorable a 'run' than 'Ion' had enjoyed, but after five nights, Vandenhoff suddenly withdrew, and though Elton volunteered to take his place, the financial condition of the theater, in spite of the undiminished popularity of the piece, put an end to its representation." (1)

It does seem idle to maintain, however, that the withdrawal of one single minor actor, who Gosse acknowledges contributed absolutely nothing to the part, could have led to the removal from the boards of a play for the continuance of which there was any demand on the part of the public. There must have been another actor ready to take his place who could not have done much worse. Although Browning professed himself satisfied with the results of the stage production at the time, years later he seemed to acknowledge its lack of success and ascribe it to the poor performance of minor actors. It is quite easy to believe that the minor actors in the company at

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(1) Gosse, EDmund: article entitled "Robert Browning"; in the "Century", Dec. 1881

Covent Garden, most of whom had earned respectable, if not commendable, reputations on the stage, would have very little interest in the play. With no enthusiasm in the parts themselves, it would hardly be expected that they would make them interesting to an audience. Several contemporary critics, while praising Macready and Helen Faucit, speak of the performances of some of the other actors as wretched, where it was not abominable.

Archer, in his life of Macready, gives Browning's opinions of the initial performance of "Strafford."

" ' Macready acted very finely,' Browning said, 'as did Miss Faucit. Pym received tolerable treatment. The rest -- for the sake of whose incompetence the play had to be reduced by at least one-third of its dialogue -- non regioniam di lor! ' " (1)

Archer says also:

"Most of the critics complained of the obscurity of the action. 'Events are implied, not stated, 'said the John Bull; 'thoughts inferred, not uttered.' Even the more than friendly Examiner could not predict permanent success for the tragedy:

" ' It should be stated, however, that it was most infamously got up; that even Mr. Macready himself was not near so fine as he is wont to be; and that for the rest of the performers, with the exception of Miss Faucit, they were a barn wonder to look at! Mr. Vandenhoff was positively nauseous, with his whining, drawling, and slouching in Pym; and Mr. Webster whimpered in somewhat too juvenile a fashion through young Vane. Some one should have stepped out of the pit and thrust Mr. Dale from the stage . . . The most striking thing of the evening was Mr. Macready's first entrance upon the stage. It was the portrait of the great and ill-fated Earl stepping from the living canvas of Vandyke.' " (2)

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(1) Archer, William: William Charles Macready, page 100
(2) Ibid.

Forster was the one leading critic who remained faithful to "Strafford." He never admitted its limitations. Macready made no further reference to it in his diary so his view of its impression on the public is unknown to us. However, his real opinion may be inferred, for actions speak louder than words. Since he made no attempt to revive it that season, we cannot feel that he considered it much of a success. What was announced as the temporary withdrawal of "Strafford" from the English stage became permanent. During his many years of acting that followed, Macready never brought it back. So it went to its grave, unwept, unhonored, and unsung!

All contemporary accounts are practically unanimous in the view that "Strafford" was a failure. Almost everywhere there was evinced a genuine desire that the play would succeed. We can detect a regretful disappointment among the critics, all of whom wanted to praise. It was the general opinion that the work was a decided retrogression from the excellence of "Paracelsus." Here is a contemporary account of an eye-witness that will testify to the general good-will that existed toward the young dramatist. This account of the opening night's performance is found in the autobiography of a contemporary poet, William Bell Scott. It occurs, incidentally, while he is speaking of Leigh Hunt:

"On the first interview, I think, it was, he told me of Browning's play of 'Strafford' being placed on the stage. This was on the first of May, 1837. My admiration for 'Paracelsus' was so great I determined to go and applaud without rhyme or reason; and so I did, in front of the pit. From the first scene it became plain that applause was not the order. The speakers had every one of them orations to deliver and no action of any kind to perform. The scene changed, another door opened, and another half-dozen gentlemen entered as long-winded as the last. Still, I kept applauding with some few others, till the howling was too overpowering and the disturbance so considerable that for a few minutes I lost my hat. The truth was that the talk was too much the same and too much in quantity; it was no use continuing to hope something would turn up to surprise the house." (1)

As piece of literature, "Strafford" is no more of a success than it is as a play. On the stage Macready and Miss Faucit could not keep it from being a failure. It is equally a failure as a piece of interesting literature. If men read it at all now, they do it as I have just done, as a duty and not a pleasure. "Strafford" is one of the most tiresome, boring, lifeless plays that I have ever read. Strafford himself has not the breath of life in him; and we cannot summon up any anguish at the expectation of his horrible fate. Personally, I wish he had laid his head on the block at the end of the first act instead of at the close of the fifth. His devotion to the false Charles, who deserts him in his hour of need, is disgustingly abject and servile, with absolutely

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(1) Scott, Wm. Bell: Autobiographic Notes; Vol. I, P. 124

nothing of the heroic about it. Indeed, it resembles too closely the weak-kneed subservience of a sycophant to be in keeping with the conduct of such a great statesman as Wentworth is supposed to have been. This is the snivel-ing of a hireling, not the loyalty of a great minister of state:

CHARLES. So disrespectful, sir?
STRAFFORD. My liege, do not believe it! I am yours,
Yours ever: 'tis too late to think about:
To the death, yours. Elsewhere, this untoward step
Shall pass for mine; the world shall think it mine.
But, here! But, here! I am so seldom here,
Seldom with you, my King! I, soon to rush
Alone upon a giant in the dark! (1)

* * * * * * * * * *

CHARLES. I've undone you, Strafford!
STRAFFORD. Nay --
Nay -- why despond, sir? 'tis not come to that!
I have not hurt you? Sir, what have I said
To hurt you? I unsay it! Don't despond!
Sir, do you turn from me? (2)

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STRAFFORD. . . Was it the day
We waited in the anteroom, till Holland
Should leave the presence-chamber?
LADY CARLISLE. What?
STRAFFORD. That I
Described to you my love for Charles?
LADY CARLISLE. (Ah, no --
One must not lure him from a love like that!
Oh, let him love the King and die!) (3)

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(1) Browning, Robert: Strafford, Act II, Sc. II
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.

From what I have read of this particular weak and vacillating Stuart, I can see no reason for such a feminine and lyrical love as gushes out toward him from his minister of state.

The minor characters in the play are but names. The speeches could be put into a hat and redistributed without any one's being the wiser. When we think of the individuality that the least of Shakespeare's characters possesses, we see how woefully Browning is lacking in a sense of real drama. Lucius, Brutus's page; Old Gobbo, Launcelot's father; Salarino and Salanio, men about town; Oswald, a mere courtier of the Danish court; the grave-diggers in "Hamlet"; and a legion of others testify to Shakespeare's power of characterization, no matter how insignificant the subject.

The love motif furnished by Lady Carlisle is pitifully weak and utterly fails to arouse any emotional response in the audience. Strafford is unaware of the lady's love until a minute before his death, so at best it is but a one-sided affair. When he does find it out, it fails to stir him anymore than it does us, so why, since it pleases neither him nor us, was it put in the play at all? A weak love interest is always a fatal blunder in the drama.

The dénouement of the play is most characterestic of the weakness of the whole work. As Strafford is led from

his room in the Tower to the block, he meets Pym, his former friend who has accomplished his destruction. These two chief figures in the tragedy gaze upon one another, speak out their minds in a few long tiresome speeches. There certainly is no tense dénouement in the spectacle of two men standing face to face, and uttering the following jerky, vague lines:

PYM. Have I done well? Speak, England! Whose sole sake
I still have labored for, with disregard
To my own heart, -- for whom my youth was made
Barren, my Future waste, to offer up
Her sacrifice -- this man, this Wentworth here --
Who walked in youth with me, loved me, it may be,
And whom, for his forsaking England's cause,
I hunted by all means (trusting that she
Would sanctify all means) even to the block
Which waits for him. And saying this, I feel
No bitterer pang than first I felt, the hour
I swore that Wentworth might leave us, but I
Would never leave him: I do leave him now.
I render up my charge (be witness, God!)
To England who imposed it. I have done
Her bidding -- poorly, wrongly, -- it may be,
With ill effects -- for I am weak, a man:
Still, I have done my best, my human best,
Not faltering for a moment. It is done.
And this said, if I say. . . yes, I will say
I never loved but one man -- David not
More Jonathan! Even thus, I love him now:
And look for my chief portion in that world
Where great hearts led astray are turned again,
(Soon it may be, and, certes, will be soon:
My mission over, I shall not live long.) --
Ay, here I know I talk -- I dare and must,
Of England, and her great reward, as all
I look for there; but in my inmost heart,
Believe, I think of stealing quite away
To walk once more with Wentworth -- my youth's friend
Purged from all error, gloriously renewed,
And Eliot shall not blame us. Then indeed . . .
This is no meeting, Wentworth! Tears increase
Too hot. A thin mist -- is it blood? -- enwraps
The face I loved once. Then, the meeting be!

STRAFFORD. I have loved England too; we'll meet
then, Pym!
As well die now! Youth is the only time
To think and to decide on a great course:
Manhood with action follows; but 'tis dreary
To have to alter our whole life in age --
The time past, the strength gone! as well die now.
When we meet, Pym, I'd be set right -- not now!
Best die. Then if there's any fault, it too
Dies, smothered up. Poor grey old little Laud
May dream his dream out of a perfect Church
In some blind corner. And there's no one left.
I trust the King now wholly to you, Pym!
And yet, I know not! I shall not be there!
Friends fail -- if he have any! And he's weak,
And loves the Queen, and . . Oh, my fate is nothing --
Nothing! But not that awful head -- not that!
Pym, you help England! I, that am to die,
What I must see! 'tis here -- all here! My God!
Let me but gasp out, in one word of fire,
How Thou wilt plague him, satiating Hell!
What? England that you help, become through you
A green and putrefying, charnel, left
Our children . . some of us have children, Pym --
Some who, without that, still must ever wear
A darkened brow, an over-serious look,
And never properly be young! No word?
You will not say a word -- to me -- to Him?
PYM. England, -- I am thine own! Dost thou exact
That service? I obey thee to the end. (1)

Contrast this lengthy, impersonal exit with Hamlet's terse "The rest is silence!" We feel like saying to Strafford,"Stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once." It would have been infinitely more pathetic if he had done so.

"Strafford" has, however, a certain importance in Browning's literary career, not because of the importance it has in itself, but because it marks his initial attempt

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(1) Browning, Robert: Strafford, Act V, Scene II

at dramatic composition. It was brought out again at the Princess's, December 21, 1886, but met with no more success than it had elicited in 1837. Since then there has been no attempt to revive it.

"King Victor and King Charles"

In "King Victor and King Charles" Browning gives us a tragedy written in four parts:

Part I, King Victor Part II, King Victor	First year
Part I, King Charles Part II, King Charles	Second year

The play was Number II of "Bells and Pomegranates" and appeared in 1842. It was never produced on the stage. The following note, prefaced to the play on its first publication, was written by Browning himself. The note has been retained ever since in all publications of the play.

"So far as I know, this tragedy is the first artistic consequence of what Voltaire termed 'a terrible event without consequences; ' and although it professes to be historical, I have taken more pains to arrive at the history than most readers would thank me for particularizing: since acquainted, as I will hope tham to be, with the chief circumstances of Victor's remarkable European career -- nor quite ignorant of the sad and surprising facts I am about to reproduce (a tolerable account of which is to be found, for instance, in Abbe Roman's 'Recit,' or even the fifth of Lord Orrery's 'Letters from Italy') -- I cannot expect them to be versed, nor desirous of becoming so, in all detail of the memoirs, correspondence, and relations of the time. From these only may be obtained a knowledge of the fiery and audacious temper, unscrupulous selfishness, profound dissimulation, and singular fertility in resources, of Victor -- the extreme and painful sensibility, prolonged immaturity of powers, earnest good purpose and vacillating will of Charles -- the noble and right woman's

manliness of his wife -- and the ill-considered rascality and subsequent better-advised rectitude of D'Ormea. When I say, therefore, that I cannot but believe my statement (combining as it does what appears correct in Voltaire and plausible in Condoreet) more true to person and thing than any it has hitherto been my fortune to meet with, no doubt my word will be taken, and my evidence spared as readily.

London, 1842. R.B." (1)

King Victor of Sardinia, arch-hypocrite and tyrant, finds himself in the toils of a most serious political crisis. His unscrupulous dealing with his various allies has been discovered at last, and they prepare to combine against him to thrust him from the map of Europe. For years he has been making false promises both at home and abroad, playing one country against another, breaking faith, and sowing the seeds of discord, rebellion, and invasion. The day of reckoning has come but Victor has one more card to play before the game is up for him. He decides, as the net closes in about him, to abdicate in favor of his son Charles, a youth whose immaturity has been the object of his father's contempt and sarcastic shafts for years.

Charles, Prince of Piedmont, is portrayed as a vacillating weakling, honest but feeble. He resents the cold contempt bestowed upon him by the King, his courtesan, and his minister. His weak nature turns for strength and encouragement to his staunch wife Polyxena. Not having

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(1) Browning, Robert: King Victor and King Charles; preface

wit enough to see the trap set for him, he accedes to his father's will and assumes the kingship. D'Ormea, the prime minister who has assisted Victor in his political intrigues, is tossed aside ruthlessly by his royal master, as such a tool is of no more use to him in the life of retirement which he is contemplating.

One year elapses and we see King Charles in his role as King of Sardinia. No longer is he crushed and impotent under the sense of his own inferiority. His honesty and good-will have brought about rapprochements with the hostile powers, as well as placated at home oppressed plebeians and tax-ridden nobles. Although Charles despises D'Ormea as one of Victor's merenaries, he retains him as his minister of state. D'Ormea, strangely enough, seeks to abet the honest policy of Charles as zealously as he had carried out heretofore the wicked machinations of his former royal master. Charles is not subtle enough, however, to perceive the change in D'Ormea, and still despises him for a charlatan and a knave. Victor perceiving that the kingdom has rallied, seeks to assume his crown once more, but Charles refuses to surrender his prerogatives. Firm in his purpose Victor plans with the help of foreign powers to make a coup d'état, and wrest the throne from his son. Informed of his father's treachery by D'Ormea, Charles refuses to believe it. However, he orders Victor brought before him under arrest in order that he may hear

him deny D'Ormea's charge. To his wife he confesses that he knows D'Ormea to be speaking the truth. The knowledge that his father is summoning his strength to combat him unnerves Charles and he resolves to abdicate. Polyxena thrusts her strength between him and his faltering courage, showing him that it is duty to rule and save his kingdom. She puts his crown upon his head, his scepter in his hand, and places him upon his throne. Thus he receives his father, brought before him by D'Ormea. Victor demands the return of his crown and Charles yields it to him. Victor's joy is short-lived for, even as he exults to know himself once more a king, he falls dead.

The play is deplorably weak in action. It never was brought out upon a stage, and never could be. The characters talk about great events, but absolutely no action takes place upon the stage. People open doors, walk upon the stage, talk at length, examine legal documents, go off stage again, and close doors after them. Such action is not the soul of great drama. I have listed the stage directions in Part I with the exception of "asides" and "alouds":

1. "Pointing to papers he has laid down, and which Polyxena examines"

2. "As he kisses her, enters from the King's apartment D'Ormea"

3. "Passing the table whereon a paper lies, exclaims, as he glances at it"

4. (D'Ormea) "who has approached them, overlooks the other paper Charles continues to hold"

5. "Touching the paper in Charles's hand" (1)

We wonder what the actors would do if the play were reduced to the pantomime which should be the skeleton of every good play, and the prop man forgot to furnish the papers. Charles's character is poorly fashioned. A weak, faltering, distrustful youth he appears at our first view of him. He goes off stage to be crowned (how much more stimulating if the ceremony had taken place before our eyes!) and returns a conquering hero, ready to cope with the intricate political and economic situations of the moment:

" . . . a new world
Brightens before me; he is moved away
-- The dark form that eclipsed it, he subsides
Into a shape supporting me like you,
And I, alone, tend upward, more and more
Tend upward: I am grown
Sardinia's King." (2)

So, as the Lord's anointed, Charles "tends upward" consistently through the second half of the play. However, the news of his father's advance against him robs him of his newly acquired courage. He says to Polyxena:

" I know that he is coming -- feel the strength
That has upheld me leave me at his coming!
'T was mine, and now he takes his own again.
Some kinds of strength are well enough to have;
But who's to have that strength? Let my crown go!
I meant to keep it; but I cannot -- cannot!
Only, he shall not taunt me -- he, the first . . .
See if he would not be the first to taunt me

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(1) Browning, Robert: King Victor and King Charles; King Charles, Part I
(2) Browning, Robert: King Victor and King Charles; King Charles, Part II

With having left his kingdom at a word,
With letting it be conquered without stroke,
With . . . no -- no -- 'tis no worse than when he left!
I've just to bid him take it, and, that over,
We'll fly away -- fly, for I loathe this Turin,
This Rivoli, all titles loathe, all state.
We'd best go to your country -- unless God
Send I die now!" (1)

Polyxena rallies his wavering courage in one of the noblest passages in the play:

"King Charles!
Pause here upon this strip of time
Allotted you out of eternity!
Crowns are from God: You in his name hold yours.
Your life's no least thing, were it fit your life
Should be abjured along with rule; but now,
Keep both! Your duty is to live and rule --
You, who would vulgarly look fine enough
In the world's eye, deserting your soul's charge, --
Ay, you would have men's praise, this Rivoli
Would be illumined! While, as 't is, no doubt,
Something of stain will ever rest on you;
No one will rightly know why you refused
To abdicate; they'll talk of deeds you could
Have done, no doubt, -- nor do I much expect
Future achievement will blot out the past,
Envelope it in haze -- nor shall we two
Live happy any more. 'T will be, I feel,
Only in moments that the duty's seen
As palpably as now; the months, the years
Of painful indistinctness are to come,
While gaily must we tread these palace-rooms
Pregnant with memories of the past: your eye
May turn to mine and find no comfort there,
Through fancies that beset me, as yourself,
Of other courses, with far other issues.
We might have taken this great night: such bear,
As I will bear! What matters happiness?
Duty! There's man's one moment: this is yours!" (2)

Victor enters, boldly acknowledges his conspiracy, and demands that Charles surrender the crown to him:

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(1) Browning, Robert: King Victor and King Charles, King Charles, Part II

(2) Ibid.

"Here to your face, amid your guards! I choose
To take again the crown whose shadow I gave --
For still its potency surrounds the weak
White locks their felon hands have discomposed.
Or I'll not ask who's King, but simply, who
Withholds the crown I claim? Deliver it!
I have no friend in the wide world: nor France
Nor England cares for me: you see the sum
Of what I can avail. Deliver it! " (1)

We wait for Charles's proud refusal. Here at last, we feel, will be a tense struggle of wills and we brace ourselves for a thrilling bit of drama. But what a disappointment Charles gives us when he calmly hands over the crown:

"Take it my father! And now say in turn,
Was it done well, my father -- sure not well.
To try me thus! I might have seen much cause
For keeping it -- too easily seen cause!
But from that moment, e'en more woefully
My life had pined away, than pine it will.
Already you have much to answer for.
My life to pine is nothing, -- her sunk eyes
Were happy once! No doubt, my people think
I am their King still . . . But I cannot strive!
Take it!" (2)

Then Victor very kindly tells Charles that he will not keep the crown long. In fact, it appears that he just likes the feeling of it on his head as he is dying. Browning attempts to work up to a dramatic effect in the death of Victor, but the passion of the dying king fails to strike a note of sincerity. For no apparent reason, he appears to repent.

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(1) Browning, Robert: King Victor and King Charles; King Charles, Part II

(2) Ibid.

"Hardly till this moment,
When I seem learning many other things
Because the time for using them is past.
If 't were to do again! That's idly wished.
Truthfulness might prove policy as good
As guile." (1)

Then in the next breath he exults that he dies as he has lived:

" . . . Guile has made me King again.
. . . . I do not repent." (2)

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

"The Return of the Druses" was published in 1843, and was first named "Mansoor the Hierophant." It originally comprised Number IV of "Bells and Pomegranates." Katherine Lee Bates states that this play was produced at Drury Lane Theater (3), but all other authorities say it was never produced, and John Parker does not include it in his list of plays acted on the London stage. (4)

The scene is laid in "an islet of the Southern Sporades, colonized by Druses of Lebanon, and garrisoned by the Knights -- Hospitallers of Rhodes." The time is the thirteenth century. Djabal, the central figure of the tragedy, is a Druse patriot whose life's mission is to free his countrymen from bondage and lead them back to Lebanon. He

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(1) Browning, Robert: King Victor and King Charles; King Charles, Part II
(2) Ibid.
(3) Bates, Katherine Lee: English Drama: A Working Basis
(4) Parker, John: Who's Who in the Theater

is the son of the last Druse Emir, and was believed to have perished in the same massacre that claimed his father. In reality, he was saved and educated in Europe. In order to win the trust and faith of his superstitious people, Djabal pretends that he is their god Hakeem, their expected Messiah, who will lead them back to their home land. Exiles from their native land, the Druses have been waiting for years the coming of their predestined deliverer, and joyously accept Djabal as their god:

"In this dim islet's virgin solitude
Tend we our faith, the spark, till happier time
Fan it to fire; till Hakeem rise again,
According to his word that, in the flesh
Which faded on Mokattam ages since,
He, at our extreme need, would interpose,
And, reinstating all in power and bliss,
Lead us himself to Lebanon once more." (1)

When the appointed hour comes, Hakeem will be ready to deliver his people. Then, they believe, he will cast off his mortal disguise and shine forth the god that he is:

". . . Once
The deed achieved, our Khalif, casting off
The embodied Awe's tremendous mystery,
The weakness of the flesh disguise, resumes
His proper glory, ne'er to fade again." (2)

In splendid contrast with Djabal is the young Frank knight Loys, generous, chivalrous, and ardently in love with the Druse maiden Anael.

Djabal is a complex character -- a hypocrite and a

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(1) Browning, Robert: The Return of the Druses; Act I
(2) Ibid.

hero by turns. His honor seems rooted in dishonor: he loves his people and would free them from the cruelty of Rhodes; but his power over them issues from his false identification of himself with Hakeem. He says upon our first view of him at the opening of Act II:

"That a strong man should think himself a God!
I -- Hakeem? To have wandered through the world,
Sown falsehood, and thence reaped now scorn, now faith,
For my one chant with many a change, my tale
Of outrage, and my prayer for vengeance -- this
Required, forsooth, no mere man's faculty,
Naught less than Hakeem's ? The persuading Loys
To pass probation here: the getting access
By Loys to the Prefect; worst of all,
The gaining my tribe's confidence by fraud
That would disgrace the very Frank, -- a few
Of Europe's secrets which subdue the flame,
The wave, -- to ply a simple tribe with these,
Took Hakeem?
And I feel this first to-day!
Does the day break, is the hour imminent
When one deed, when my whole life's deed, my deed
Must be accomplished? Hakeem? Why the God?
Shout, rather, 'Djabal, Youssof's child, thought slain
With his whole race, the Druses' Sheikhs, this prefect
Endeavored to extirpate -- saved, a child,
Returns from traversing the world, a man,
Able to take revenge, lead back the march
To Lebanon' -- so shout, and who gainsays?
But now, because delusion mixed itself
Insensibly with this career, all's changed!
Have I brought Venice to afford us convoy?
'True -- but my jugglings wrought that! '
Put I heart
Into our people where no heart lurked? -- 'Ah,
What cannot an impostor do! '
Not this!
Not do this which I do! Not bid avaunt
Falsehood! Thou shalt not keep thy hold on me!
-- Nor even get a hold on me! 'Tis now --
This day -- hour -- minute -- 'tis as here I stand
On the accursed threshold of the Prefect,
That I am found deceiving and deceived!
And now what do I? -- hasten to the few
Deceived, ere they deceive the many -- shout,

'As I professed, I did believe myself!
Say, Druses, had you seen a butchery --
If Ayoob, Marshook saw -- Maani there
Must tell you how I saw my father sink;
My mother's arms twine still about my neck;
I hear my brother shriek, here's yet the scar
Of what was meant for my own death-blow -- say
If you had woke like me, grown year by year
Out of the tumult in a far-off clime,
Would it be wondrous such delusion grew?
I walked the world, asked help at every hand;
Came help or no? Not this and this? Which helps
When I returned with, found the Prefect here,
The Druses here, all here but Hakeem's self,
The Khalif of the thousand prophecies,
Reserved for such a juncture, -- could I call
My mission aught but Hakeem's? Promised Hakeem
More than performs the Djabal -- you absolve?
-- Me, you will never shame before the crowd
Yet happily ignorant? -- Me, both throngs surround,
The few deceived, the many unabused,
-- Who, thus surrounded, slay for you and them
The Prefect, lead to Lebanon?" (1)

Djabal has entered into secret negotiations with Venice, the arch enemy of the Hospitallers. He has promised to kill the Prefect; annihilate the enemy's garrison; and deliver the island to Venice. In return, Venetian argosies will transport the Druses back to Lebanon.

The play opens on the morning of the day of deliverance. The Druses are awaiting the return of the Prefect from Rhodes. His assassination is the initial step in Djabal's plan of deliverance. Anael loves Djabal but fears that her love has too much of the human element in it to be pleasing to the great god Hakeem. Her love of him, tinged with adoration as it is, makes Djabal keenly aware

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(1) Browning, Robert: The Return of the Druses; Act II, lines 1 to 61.

of his deception. In an ectasy of religious zeal, Anael anticipates Djabal's act, and kills the Prefect herself. She begs Djabal to become Hakeem and exalt himself and her. Profoundly moved, Djabal tells her that he is but a mortal. Anael forgives him his deception, but urges him to confess the truth to the tribe. This he will not do, because the cause of his people would be lost if their faith in him were destroyed. Overcome by a sense of his unworthiness, she denounces him.

Djabal, realizing at last his great love for Anael, prepares to confess his imposture to the Druses when the girl, all her old love sweeping over her, rushes to him crying, "Hakeem!" She dies in that cry hailing him as a god, and vindicates him before the Druses. The faith of the Druses in their leader is restored, for they believe that Hakeem has rewarded the treachery of Anael's denunciation with death. As Djabal wavers, the Venetian trumpet announces that his allies have landed upon the island, and Djabal asks Loys to lead his people back to Lebanon. The Druses beg him to exalt himself and so he does, following Anael into eternity:

"DJABAL. [Bending over Anael] Ah, did I dream I was
to have, this day,
Exalted thee? A vain dream: hast thou not
Won greater exaltation? What remains
But press to thee, exalt myself to thee?
Thus I exalt myself, set free my soul!
[He stabs himself]" (1)

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(1) Browning, Robert: The Return of the Druses; Act V

The poet's choice of dramatic material is unfortunate. We are interested in Greek and Roman heroes; in Hebrew patriarchs; their civilization and culture appeals to our sympathies. It takes, however, more dramatic talent than Browning possesses to interest us emotionally in a forlorn tribe of Druses in an islet of the Southern Sporades, personified in such obscure figures as: "Djabal", "Khalif", "Anael", "Maani", "Karshook", "Raghib", "Ayoob", and others.

The first few moments after the rising of the curtain upon a tragedy should be a time of intense interest for the spectator. As he listens to the opening dialogue, bit by bit his eager brain pieces together the antecedent action, until the past is all unfolded before him. A dramatist works skilfully to create, not vague, confused, impressions, but clearly defined effects. Let us suppose ourselves a spectator as the curtain rises on Act I of "The Return of the Druses." Hearing these first five speeches, what impression would be created within us?

"KARSHOOK. The moon is carried off in purple fire:
Day breaks at last! Break glory, with the day,
On Djabal's dread incarnate mystery
Now ready to resume its pristine shape
Of Hakeem, as the Khalif vanished erst
In what seemed death to uninstructed eyes,
On red Mokattam's verge -- our Founder's flesh,
As he resumes our Founder's function!
AYOOB. -- Most joy be thine, O Mother-mount!
Thy brood
Returns to thee, no outcasts as we left,

But thus -- but thus! Behind, our Prefect's corse;
Before, a presence like the morning -- thine,
Absolute Djabal late, -- God Hakeem now
That day breaks!
KARSHOOK. Off then, with disguise at last!
As from our forms this hateful garb we strip,
Lose every tongue its glozing accent too,
Discard each limb the ignoble gesture! Cry,
'Tis the Druse Nation, warders on our Mount,
Of the world's secret, since the birth of time,
-- No spawn of Christians are we, Prefect, we
Who rise . . .
AYOOB. Who shout . . .
RAGHIB. Who seize, a first-fruits, ha --
Spoil of the spoiler! Brave! " (1)

In this play, too many obscure, unfamiliar names crowd upon our ears: "Djabal", "Hakeem", "Khalif", "Mokaltam", "Christian Prefect", "Druse exiles", "the Patriarch's Nuncio". We miss the present thought pondering over the unintelligible one that has just gone. We are disturbed by an uneasy feeling of inadequacy certainly not conducive to the sense of pleasure that we have a right to expect from the theater.

A good example of Browning's inability to make the dramatic action move is the love scene between Djabal and Anael, in which the girl tries to get rid of her worldly leaning toward Loys and rise to the higher levels of the gods with Hakeem. The two commence their interview with fifty-four lines of commentary and self-analysis, conveyed in two asides to the audience. Surely, from the point of view of the actors alone, it would be hard to make such a

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(1) Browning, Robert: The Return of the Druses; Act I, lines 1 to 27

scene appear realistic upon the stage.

The idea-content of the play is one that would leave the average audience emotionally cold. We never get that sense that, out of the march of events, out of the rapid, violent happenings before us, come forth human souls born to fulfill their fate and to complete their destiny right before our very eyes.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" will always be famous because it led to an estrangement between Browning and Macready. There are many and various reasons given for the cause of their quarrel, but most of the accounts come from Browning partisans. Unfortunately, Macready did not leave us his side of the controversy. Lounsbury goes into this matter at some length. He says:

> "A trustworthy account of the fortunes of this play is all the more important because the grossest misstatements about it have become current. They have indeed, become so current that there is no little danger of their permanent embodiment in literary history. The pity of it is that these misstatements owe their origin largely to Browning himself -- I need hardly add, with no idea on his part of their fictitious nature. The production of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" was in one respect an event in his life. It led to an estrangement between him and Macready. The great actor in consequence had no share in the performance of this tragedy, though it was brought out at his theater. The part he would naturally have taken was assumed by Samuel Phelps. According to Browning's statement it was his own personal dissatisfaction with the reluctance shown at first by Macready to appear in it which led him to insist upon the actor's substitute retaining his place in

the play instead of yielding it to the manager who had apparently repented of his unwillingness.

"This manifest reluctance to bring out the play accords little with the assertion now frequently made that Macready was constantly beseeching the poet to write plays for him to act. This on the surface is improbable, after his previous experience with "Strafford." It certainly receives no countenance from anything to be found in the actor's own diary. Browning's conduct on this occasion, as he afterward confessed, showed ignorance of the proper course to be pursued. But as he himself reports the circumstances, it evinced something more than ignorance. In the accounts given neither he nor any of his admirers seem to be struck by the assurance, to call it by the least offensive name, of a dramatic author presuming to dictate to a manager, who chanced also to be the leading English actor of his time, who should take the principal part in a piece brought out at the theater under his direction. To Macready himself it must have seemed unparalleled impudence. But, whatever may be the opinion we hold as to the propriety of this action, there can be no dispute as to its impolicy. To have a new play brought out at Macready's theater, without Macready in it, was courting failure, no matter whether much or little money was spent on the accompaniments of its representation." (1)

Archer quotes this letter sent him by the author:

" 'It would seem, by all the evidence I had afterwards,' Mr. Browning writes to me, 'that I was supposed to myself understand the expediency of begging to withdraw, at least for a time, my own work -- saving Macready the imaginary failure to keep a promise to which I never attached particular importance. As so many hints to my dull perception of this, Macready declined to play his part, caused the play to be read in my absence to the actors by a ludicrously incapable person -- the result being, as he informed me, "that the play was laughed at from the beginning to the end" -- naturally enough, a girl's part being made comical by a red-nosed, one-legged, elderly gentleman (Willmott, the prompter) -- then, after proposing to take away from his substitute the opportunity of distinction he had given him (to which I refused my consent), leaving the play to a fate which it somehow managed to escape. Macready was fuori di se from the moment when, in pure ignorance of what he was driving at, I acquiesced in his

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(1) Lounsbury, Thomas R. : The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning; pages 113-114

proposal that a serious play of any pretension should appear under his management with any other protagonist than himself. When the more learned subsequently enlightened me a little, I was angry and disinclined to take advice -- but it is happily over so long ago! One friendly straightforward word to the effect that what was intended for an advantage would, under circumstances of which I was altogether ignorant, prove the reverse -- how easy to have spoken, and what regret it would have spared us both!' " (1)

Lounsbury, a careful and impartial critic, exonerates Macready from any guilt in the failure of the play. He says:

"There is indeed no question that the play, so far from being the complete success which Browning termed it, was a failure. Such was the view taken of its fortunes in all contemporary notices, whether friendly or hostile. In 'The Examiner' Forster justly praised the tragedy as a work of rare beauty and as unutterably tender and passionate. Still he did not venture to predict for it anything but a short existence on the stage. That it succeeded fairly well the first night may be freely admitted. But the same thing is to be said of many pieces that then failed -- in particular of the very two already mentioned which followed it the same season at the same theater. If contemporary evidence can be trusted, each of these was received the first night with more enthusiasm than was Browning's play. Yet each failed to attract audiences, each was speedily withdrawn. Their fate was the very one which befell 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.' At its original performance there was a strong body of admirers present, brought thither by personal regard for the author or impressed by the power and passion displayed in the poetry. But there was also a distinct minority of dissentients. We know that even on this first representation hisses were heard. 'The author,' says the report in 'The Times', 'was called for at the conclusion, but there was quite enough of disapprobation expressed to account for his unwillingness to appear.' " (2)

The only American production of the play on record is that brought out by Lawrence Barrett in Washington.

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(1) Archer, William: William Charles Macready; page 136
(2) Lounsbury, Thomas R. : The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning; page 130

Barrett speaks of its success before a "most distinguished audience." That he overrated its reception seems probable in view of the subsequent lack of demand for its revival. Here is an excerpt from a letter written by Mr. Barrett to William J. Rolfe:

"I had learned to value Browning as a dramatic poet before I knew that he was not so considered by his critics. In the midst of a reading which had only professional aims in view my attention was called to this poet by one who shares his genius in a remarkable degree, not only as a dramatic poet, but as, indeed, our only American dramatic poet in its highest sense -- George H. Boker.

"I had heard 'My Last Duchess' and 'In a Gondola' read most eloquently by Mr. Boker, and I then turned to the poet's works to find for myself the greatest of dramas in 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.' While I was at once arrested by the majesty of the verse, my mind was more attracted by the dramatic quality of the story, which stamped the author at once as a master of theatric form of narration -- the oldest and the greatest of all forms.

"I saw in Thorold a clear and perfectly outlined character suited to stage purposes; in Mildred and Mertoun a pair of lovers whose counterparts may be found only in the immortal lovers of Verona, Juliet and Romeo, while they are as distinctly original as those of Shakespeare; and in Guendolen a revival of Imogen herself. I saw that the play, like many plays of the earlier dramatists as well as those contemporary with this production, was written for an age when the ear of the auditor was more attentive than the eye, and when the appliances of the stage were less ample than now; and I saw that, with a treatment of the text such as all stage managers have freely given even to the plays of the greatest of all dramatists, the 'Blot in the 'Scutcheon' would take a front rank as an acting play.

"With this idea I awaited my approaching visit to London, in the hope that I might meet the poet and persuade him to make certain slight alterations or permit me to stage it in the modern way. I found him as eager for the glory of the theater as when he produced his 'Strafford,' six years before, and while he was unable, as he said, to go over the text extensively to meet the stage requirements, he would gladly consent to its presentation with

the ordinary changes which the stage manager makes in such matters.

"I had gained only a part of my purpose, but I determined to make the best of such license as he gave me; and the result was that, with a few verbal inversions and a slight cutting of the text, the play was given in Washington before a most distinguished audience with remarkable effect, and it has since taken its place in my repertoire with the other great plays of kindred dramatists.

"The difficulties have been in finding proper persons to represent the parts. Mertoun and Mildred are especially hard to fill, but in Mr. Mosley and in Miss Allen these characters had adequate representatives, while the Guendolen of Miss Gale and the Gerald of Mr. Rogers were portraits worthy of the author.

"Looking back over the literary and biographical history of the past half-century no event seems to have borne greater misfortune to the stage and the drama generally than the misunderstanding between Mr. Browning and Mr. Macready over the initial performance of this play. It is all the more to be regretted that it arose from no ill-intent on the part of either; but it drove from the stage a poet who only needed the experience at the manager's table which all the great dramatists have found so valuable to have given us a new gallery of stage portraits. Here was, again, a poet whose thoughts fell at once into the dramatic form, whose characters unfolded themselves by act and speech, whose treatment of subject involved a rising interest and a progressive movement, terminating in an adequate denouement, while the verse bore the impress which lives in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and in 'Marlowe's mighty line,' and heir to the fellowship of those writers who have made the drama's history sublime and achieved the highest fame.

"A little familiarity with the mechanism of the theater, such as Shakespeare, Alfieri, or Goldoni had, such as all the successful dramatists have had, and we should possess great plays as well as great poems from the pen of Robert Browning. Then the grand traits of his two heroines in the dramatic poem 'In a Balcony' would have shone in the theatrical frame resplendent with the Antoinette of Giacometti or the Ophelia and Portia of Shakespeare; while the 'Flight of the Duchess' and other remarkable poems would have obeyed the grand laws of the dramatic form, and gone into line with the creations of those great poets with whom only Browning may be classed -- 'the immortal names

that were not born to die.' " (1)

Naturally, we are interested in the reason for the failure of the play at its original representation, and its failure in the few attempts which have been made to revive it since that time. In all it has been produced:

Drury Lane -- February 1843
Sadler's Wells -- November 27, 1848
Olympic -- March 15, 1888
Opéra Comique -- June 15, 1893 (2)

"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" is certainly the deepest and finest of all Browning's dramas. Its very simplicity and singleness of plot add to the power of the effect it produces. The characters are not the lay figures that we find in "Strafford" but all living breathing human souls -- souls who are spending their earthly days in loving and suffering with their fellow creatures, and in depending upon them, too, for their happiness or woe. We have flesh and blood individuals placed before us here, men and women real enough to stir our profoundest human feelings. By the nearest and dearest ties that can bind souls together, they are bound up in the dark web of a bitter fate. Ruthlessly they are rushed to their doom. The scene is laid in England sometime in the eighteenth century. The motive is family honor and dishonor. The story appeals to the common human emotions, emotions so deeply rooted that they

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(1) Rolfe, William J. : A Blot in the 'Scutcheon and Other Dramas by Robert Browning

(2) Parker, John: Who's Who in the Theater

make a trememdous popular appeal. The play involves a two-fold tragedy -- a tragedy of sin and a tragedy of misunderstanding. The latter hangs on a word, a word spoken too late to save three lives. The irony of circumstances, the source of earth's saddest discords, is always powerfully dramatic. Briefly this is the story:

Henry, Earl Mertoun, a young nobleman of rich and irreproachable lineage, asks Thorold, Earl Tresham, for the hand of his young sister in marriage. Thorold, the honored head of a proud house, is inordinately proud of his family honor and of his yet stainless escutcheon. He is proud, too, with a deep brotherly affection, of his young sister Mildred. He rejoices in her fine nature, one that would instinctively be cited as "the perfect spirit of honor." Delighted with the advent of such an acceptable suitor, Thorold promises to present his offer to Mildred who, he says, will decide the matter for herself. Mildred is most favorably inclined to the earl's suit and listens eagerly to the praise which he evokes from her family. She discusses Mertoun with her cousin Guendolen, the fiancée of her younger brother, who is already anticipating with joy a happy alliance between the two young people.

Left alone, Mildred signals for her lover to enter her chamber, and we discover her midnight lover to be none other than Earl Mertoun who has but that day sued for her hand. The illicit clandestine union sears both their

young hearts, and they look forward to their approaching marriage as a "blessed end" which will "soothe up the curse of the beginning." Their love, although saddened by their sense of guilt, is, nevertheless, deep and abiding, and they rejoice in the thought of a "happiness such as the world contains not; the world's best of blisses."

Mildred, feeling a very hypocrite to meet Mertoun the next day as a stranger, and loathing to assume a virginity which she no longer possesses, begs for one more day's respite. Mertoun plans to make his farewell visit to her chamber the following night.

Unfortunately, just as the lovers' mesalliance bids fair to reach a happy ending, Gerard, an old family retainer, feels that he must tell his master, Tresham, of the nocturnal visitor to Mildred's room. He is unable to identify the man except that he is noble and goes armed to his rendezvous.

Tresham, who is inordinately jealous of his family honor, confronts Mildred with Gerard's accusation and is distraught, not only by her avowal of guilt, but also at what he considers her wanton acceptance of Mertoun's offer of marriage. Such a betrayal of a "trusting youth" who thinks her all that's chaste and good and pure" calls down his curse upon her. "I curse her to her face before you all!" Mildred steadfastly refuses to tell her lover's

name, and sinks down under the weight of her shame, and her brother's ire. Guendolen, with a beautiful compassion, comforts the broken girl, and commands, also, the forgiveness and aid of Austin.

Meanwhile Tresham, resolved to avenge this blot upon his family escutcheon, heretofore so free from reproach, rushes to meet his sister's lover. Mertoun reveals his identity and attempts to explain the tangle to Tresham. The injured earl refuses to listen and, in the duel that ensues, mortally wounds the younger man, who refuses to defend himself. As Mertoun is dying, he tells the story of his love for Mildred: "Her love is bound up in the life that's bleeding fast away." Tresham, struck to the heart with remorse, and realizing too late his terrible mistake, promises to convey the youth's dying message to Mildred:

" . . . . Now say you this to her --
You, not another -- say, I saw him die
As he breathed this, 'I love her' -- you don't know
What those three small words mean! Say, loving her
Lowers me down the bloody slope to death
With memories -- I speak to her, not you,
Who had no pity, will have no remorse.
Perchance intend her -- Die along with me,
Dear Mildred! 't is so easy, and you'll 'scape
So much unkindness! Can I lie at rest,
With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds
Done to you? -- heartless men shall have my heart,
And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,
Aware, perhaps, of every blow -- O God! --
Upon those lips -- yet of no power to tear
The felon stripe by stripe! Die, Mildred! Leave
Their honorable world to them! For God
We're good enough, though the world casts us out." (1)

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act III, Scene I

The news of her lover's death breaks Mildred's heart, and she dies with forgiveness on her lips for the brother who killed him. Thorold rejoices to see her freed from her misery, and then, having swallowed poison, follows her. The lovers had prayed for a "new life, like a young sunrise" to "break on the strange unrest" of their night, and together they go to find it in eternity. "On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round."

I have told the story looking at it in as idealistic a light as I possibly could. I think that this is the way Browning meant it to sink home to his audience. As a matter of fact, there are so many glaring inconsistencies in the play, that we are prevented from enjoying it even as a most idealistic interpretation of life.

At the risk of descending from the sublime to the ridiculous, I am reminded of a famous line in George Cohan's fine satire, "The Tavern". At a tense moment in the plot, a comedy character stumbles upon the stage, asking: "What's all the shooting for?" Many times in Browning's play, I found myself crying: "What's all the tragedy for?" Why could not Mertoun have married Mildred before they became steeped in sin? What was there to stop the lovers from an honorable course? There was no enmity between their houses, as in the case of Romeo and Juliet; no barrier to their love, as in the case of Paola and Francesca or Launcelot and Guinevere. They were both young, well-born, wealthy,

and unmarried -- why, then, the agonizing and fatal delay? Mertoun gives as his excuse his boyish timidity and fear of Lord Tresham. But, surely, common decency should overrule any such fears as these. He has fear of a harsh look from the brother; he has no fear to defile the purity of a fourteen year old sister.

Matthew Arnold once wrote in a letter to Henry Arthur Jones: "I must add that I dislike seduction dramas -- even in 'Faust' the feeling tells with me." I heartily agree with Arnold, and the particular seduction motif about which this play revolves is to me most nauseating to reflect upon. In a Paola and Francesca we could understand the agony of remorse which would have accompanied the lovers' guilt; but why do two people, in whose path there is no conceivable impediment to marriage, agonize over a guilty love which they still deliberately pursue? And why does the author ask us to believe that such creatures are the essence of honor, pure souls of the stuff from which spiritual heroes are made?

Then again, when Mertoun's suit for Mildred's hand is accepted with pleasure and courtesy by the Earl, why do the young people jeopardize their whole future happiness by two more hazardous meetings? Surely, even morons would be intelligent enough to take better precautions to safeguard their future happiness than these two did.

The lyric which Mertoun sings as he climbs into Mildred's room at midnight is a good example of how the commendable and the ludicrous are blended together in this strange play. "There's a woman like a dewdrop, she's so purer than the purest." Truly Shakespearian it is in its delicacy and musical lyric quality, but most unShakespearian in its place in the play. Surely, no one in dire need of secrecy, would at midnight come up to his lady's room singing a song; and no one but a satirist would have the despoiler of a girl's purity come singing into her room "she's so purer than the purest." Nor would he, to rouse anyone within ear-shot who had not heard his song, ask the girl to pace the chamber with him. The man who wrote that scene certainly was no playwright -- in fact, he seems to lack almost a sense of humor!

Then again, consider that Mildred knows that her secret has been discovered. Naturally she must realize her brother will be on the watch for her lover. Any human girl would attempt to prevent the inevitable catastrophe. What does Mildred do? A stage direction tells us: "The light is placed above in the purple pane." The signal comes after Thorold has discovered her lover's visits!

Guendolen seems to be the one rational character in the play, but even her presence of mind deserts her. She does not try to pluck the fatal signal from the window, nor does she think to send the submissive Austin to stop

the Earl. Browning evidently was determined to make a tragedy out of the play, although there is not a single factor in the plot to warrant it.

Mildred's sole excuse for her sin seems to be her cry of despair, repeated so often:

> "I was so young, I loved him so, I had
> No mother, God forgot me, and I fell." (1)

A master of pathos, himself, Dickens said of this cry:

> "Browning's play has thrown me into a perfect passion of sorrow. To say that there is anything in its subject save what is lovely, true, deeply affecting, full of the best emotion, the most earnest feeling, and the most true and tender source of interest, is to say that there is no light in the sun, and no heat in blood. It is full of genius, natural and great thoughts, profound and yet simple and beautiful in its vigor. I know nothing that is so affecting, nothing in any book I have ever read, as Mildred's recurrence to that 'I was so young -- I had no mother.' I know no love like it, no passion like it, no moulding of a splendid thing after its conception, like it. And I swear it is a tragedy that must be played; and must be played, moreover, by Macready. There are some things I would have changed if I could (they are very slight, mostly broken lines); and I assuredly would have the old servant begin his tale upon the scene; and be taken by the throat, or drawn upon, by his master, in its commencement. But the tragedy I never shall forget, or less vividly remember than I do now. And if you tell Browning that I have seen it, tell him that I believe from my soul there is no man living (and not many dead) who could produce such a work." (2)

So Dickens wrote. However, the closer I examine Mildred's reasoning processes the stranger her line of reasoning strikes me. She speaks of her sin as if it were but one infringement of the moral law. In the face of

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act III, Scene I

(2) Forster, John: Life of Dickens; Vol.II, page 46

Mertoun's nightly visits, this seems woefully out of place. She regrets the fall with such terrific anguish that we cannot help wondering why she repeats it nightly. Only two nights elapse before the lovers can openly avow their love, and yet they cannot forego their nightly meetings. Still Dickens could say: "I know nothing in any book I have ever read so affecting as Mildred's recurrence to that 'I was so young -- I had no mother.' " Her repentance instead of coming after her sin runs parallel with it. This seems to me one of the gravest weaknesses of the many in the play.

No doubt Browning meant to give us in this play an impressive illustration of Aristotle's theory of catharsis. In a better worked out plot, our pity for the loving heart of Mildred, crushed under the weight of its one sin, would have been well-nigh agonizing in its intensity. The human frailty in a character essentially pure and noble should have been made to bring about the fatal crisis of the play. As it is, each of the characters involved in the disastrous dénouement brings down his own punishment upon his head, and the tragedy is heightened by the fact that it is due to mistake rather than to deliberate intention.

Of course, people are far more fastidious in reading or studying a play than they are in watching it acted out before their eyes. I have seen vast audiences snivel at moving pictures with plots just as ridiculous as this of

Browning's, and they certainly were not all simpletons either. I imagine that with good acting, a Helen Faucit, for example, in the part of Mildred, the sight of a fourteen year old child caught in the throes of one of life's sternest struggles, before she is even yet a woman, could be made poignantly affecting.

A cleverer dramatist could have done much with the character of Mildred. He could have made her a woman to whom much must be forgiven because she loved much. Into what a noble nature would Shakespeare have had this "dram of eale," this "mole of nature," enter. Shakespeare would have created here a pathetic example of Aristotle's "Hamartia", that is, the human frailty in an essentially noble nature causing tragedy. Mildred would, in his hands, be shown to deserve her brother's praises, and we should have some reason to believe in:

" . . . the good and tender heart,
Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
As light where friends are -- how imbued with lore
The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
The -- one might know I talked of Mildred -- thus
We brothers talk!" (1)

There is a dramatic effect in the reversal of fortune, "Peripetia", suffered by Mildred, fallen a victim to her own youth and ignorance of life! But another day has passed in her life, and the same voice cries in scorn:

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act I, Scene II

" . . . . . you have heard
Of wretched women -- all but Mildreds -- tied
By wild illicit ties to losels vile
You'd tempt them to forsake; and they'll reply
'Gold, friends, repute, I left for him, I find
In him, why should I leave him then for gold,
Repute or friends?' -- and you have felt your heart
Respond to such poor outcasts of the world
As to so many friends; base as you please,
You've felt they were God's men and women still,
So not to be disowned by you. But she
That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
Their intercourse the surelier; and, for this,
I curse her to her face before you all.
Shame hunt her from the earth! " (1)

Here is sincere desolation -- pathetic, profound, and hopeless! In the hands of a Shakespeare, the compassion that we feel for the innocent hero would pale before the sympathy which would rush out to the frail Mildred, the unhappy victim of impulse, accident, and emotional impetuosity: "More sinned against than sinning!" He would have created such a woman as Carlyle describes Dante's Francesca to be: "He pitied her and would not have willingly placed her in that torment, but it was the justice of God's law that doomed her there . . . for life is but a series of errors, made good again by repentance."

In Mildred we see that dreadful foreboding of tragedy to come met with so often in Shakespeare. In spite of the apparent happy outcome of their difficulty, she says: "Sin has surprised us; so will punishment." Like a death knell,

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(1)Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act I, Sc.II

her presentiment foreshadows the tragedy of the dénouement, and our thoughts hasten on to the terrible retribution which awaits the lovers. Pathetic and pitiful, she walks through the play with the shadow of her fate always falling before her on her path.

One pleasant factor of this play, at least, is the comforting optimism toward life that Browning exhibits. So much of modern and ancient drama makes one despair, that it is, indeed, a keen pleasure to come into contact with Browning's refreshing, buoyant, inspiring hopefulness. Mildred, confronted with her sin, all hope dead with her lover, sinking to her death, can still put her trust in the goodness of God's mercy:

" . . As I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain,
But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven . . " (1)

Even if the emotional values of the play were true, the faults in the mechanical construction alone would doom it to failure. For example, the very first scene of a play should strike a ringing keynote, but Browning's does not. Gerard's aversion to the marriage preparations, although it is an unmistakable finger-post, does not establish the atmosphere of tragedy in which the play is to move. We

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, Act III, Scene II

have only to compare this introductory scene with some of Shakespeare's to see its ineffectuality in arousing interest. We have a feeling that these retainers are gathered together upon the stage just long enough to feed us bit by bit the necessary antecedent action.

"SECOND RETAINER. Now, Gerard, out with it!
What makes you sullen, this of all the days
I' the year? Today that young, rich, bountiful,
Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they match
With our Lord Tresham through the country-side,
Is coming here in utmost bravery
To ask our master's sister's hand?
GERARD. What then?
SECOND RETAINER. What then? Why, you, she speaks to, if she meets
Your worship, smiles on as you hold apart
The boughs to let her through her forest walks,
You, always favorite for your no-deserts
You've heard these three days how Earl Mertoun sues
To lay his heart and house and broad lands too
At Lady Mildred's feet; and while we squeeze
Ourselves into a mouse-hole lest we miss
One congée of the page in his train,
You sit o' one side -- 'there's the Earl,' say I --
'What then,' say you!" (1)

What meets the eye in a modern stage production is of just as much importance as what the ear receives. The stage directions to Scene I read: "The interior of a lodge in Lord Tresham's park. Many RETAINERS crowded at the window." A view of men's backs, their attention focused on something entirely out of sight of the audience, is not a stimulating introduction for a drama.

In this very first scene, too, we have illustrated

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act I, Scene I

that peculiar abruptness of Browning's style which makes the dialogue difficult to understand. Notice the jerky effect which the abrupt transitions and the disjointed sentences give to some of the speeches. An actor, in speaking blank verse, expects cooperation from the measured melody of the lines. Both actor and audience are disconcerted by a style which seeks to convey its meaning by starts and jerks.

Notice the jerky effect of these lines:

" . . But you'd not have a boy --
And what's the Earl beside, -- possess too soon
That stateliness?" (1)

Or take this speech, the first words addressed by Tresham to Mertoun. How difficult for an actor to sustain the appositive matter between the "your name" of the second line and the "your name" of the eighth line.

"I welcome you, Lord Mertoun, yet once more,
To this ancestral roof of mine. Your name --
Noble among the noblest in itself,
Yet taking in your person, fame avers,
New price and lustre -- as that gem you wear,
Transmitted from a hundred knightly breasts,
Fresh chased and set and fixed by its last lord,
Seems to re-kindle at the core -- your name
Would win you welcome!" (2)

Long, subordinate ideas, such as we have here, make the meaning extremely difficult for an auditor to follow, and make it difficult for an actor to recite his lines smoothly.

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(1) Browning, Robert: A Blot in the 'Scutcheon; Act I, Sc. I

(2) Ibid.

The intensity of feeling is so great in this play that we almost forget, in reading it, the lack of action in the actual scenes portrayed upon the stage. Many times we have, also, in the play merely a dialogue between two characters, and this monotonous repetition of stage business grows wearisome. The characters expend so much energy in talking to one another, that they have no energy left to do anything except open the door marked "Exit." They discuss their feelings instead of being inspired by them into action. They forget, too, that the audience is always waiting for something to happen on the stage. The eye is as interested as the ear. In Act I, Scene III, for instance, Mildred and Guendolen carry on a dialogue for three pages. Guendolen goes and Mertoun takes up the tale with Mildred where she leaves off, carrying it forward for five pages. Act II begins with a dialogue between Tresham and Gerard; then we have a soliloquy of twenty-three lines from Tresham, which passes at length into a dialogue with Guendolen. Another soliloquy ends in another dialogue between Tresham and Mildred. A trio made up of Mildred, Guendolen, and Austin breaks this monotony for a brief moment at the end of Act II, but in Act III we have again a dialogue between Tresham and Mertoun to the extent of six and a half pages. However, this scene is rich in action; it is, in truth, the most dramatic in the whole play. I merely include it here to show the amount of time during the play in which we have

but two people on the stage. For the next two pages we have a full stage, and then follows a lengthy dialogue between Mildred and Thorold, relieved at the very end by the brief presence of Guendolen and Austin.

To the eye, with the exception of the duel scene, the stage remains static for a good deal of the three acts. When two people carry on a conversation, no matter how intense their emotions may be, they outwardly remain comparatively stationary. The Anglo-Saxon race is not a race to accompany its speech with pantomime, and hence three-quarters of this play would present to the audience no action other than the opening and shutting of doors. In reading the play, this would escape notice, but in actually watching it being performed over the footlights, it would be deadly. We are not interested so much in what people say as we are in what they do. The skeleton of every good play, it is said, should be a pantomime; but Act III, Scene I, is the only bit of this play that I can see performed in pantomime, and this scene leaves nothing to be desired. Its movement supports the play to the very end, sustaining the ensuing dialogue between Mildred and Thorold. It would be impossible, however, to act out in pantomime the first part of the play, and this is the reason for its ineffectuality upon the stage.

Mildred could perform her share of the whole play, with the single exception of putting the signal light in

her window, sitting in an armchair, if she felt so inclined. No amount of fine acting can overcome the lack of dramatic action, or make the play bound forward with life and movement when these vital qualities are not inherent in the structure itself. We cannot feel with Browning that we can sit whole hours in a theater listening to a wearisome exposition of a tangle of evil and good just to witness one shining moment at the end spring forward to do its work of severing shame from splendor, right from wrong.

Then, too, Browning's settings lack color woefully. How often in Shakespeare's tragedies we note a brilliance gained from the romantic terror of the actual setting itself! The graveyard with its bones and skulls into which the fair Ophelia's cortege is carried; the sepulchral ghost of King Hamlet stalking upon the midnight air of Elsinore; Juliet's tomb with its ghastly suggestiveness of death; the wind-swept heath upon which the filthy hags hurl their prophecies at Macbeth -- all these excite the imagination and help to arouse that "special pleasure" which Aristotle says tragedy should give us. Browning fails to use the opportunity afforded him by his tragic subject matter to create scenes like these containing touches of ghastly suggestiveness. The value of setting in lending color to the story is one of the "tricks of the trade" that a clever playwright would instinctively

know and use.

The lack of action and the singleness of plot in this play are in remarkable contrast to Shakespeare's handling of a story. Contrast it with the five-fold plot of the "Merchant of Venice" -- the story of the pound of flesh, the story of the caskets, the Gobbo theme, and the story of the rings, and the story of the elopement. We have an action bright yet serious in the casket story; tragic in the story of the bond; merry and gay in the jest of the betrothal rings. If an action is single, it must be developed, in a tragedy, with a terrible suddenness and intensity, hurrying from first to last with a cumulative force that carries us breathlessly and inevitably on with it.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

The comedy "Colombe's Birthday" was published in 1844 as Number VI of "Bells and Pomegranates." It was first produced at the Haymarket Theater on April 25, 1853, with Miss Helen Faucit in the part of Colombe. It was brought out again at St. George's Hall on November 19, 1885, under the auspices of the Browning Society with Miss Alma Murray taking the part of Colombe. The play observes the unities, the action taking place from morning to night in one day and all in the palace of the Duchess.

Colombe, the youthful Duchess of Ravestein, of

Juliers, and of Cleves, awakes upon her birthday, and the anniversary of her accession, to find that she is not the true heir to the duchy that she rules. Prince Berthold arrives with undisputable proofs of his right to take possession. Generously, but with no pretence of love, Berthold offers to marry Colombe, deeming it an honor for any woman to mount with him the ladder of fame which he plans to reach even to the heights of emperor of the realm.

One by one Colombe sees the sycophant courtiers desert her, all ready to transfer their affections to the new Duke. Only one man, a poor advocate from Cleves, comes staunchly to the girl's side, offering her his loyalty and his love. Girl though she is, she realizes the sterling worth of Valence's manhood, and accepts his love, though it means the cessation of her material advancement.

In this play we have another illuminating example of a difficult situation bringing out hitherto unknown and unsuspected traits of character. A single day decides the course of Colombe's whole future life. As she herself says:

"This is indeed my birthday -- soul and body,
Its hours have done on me the work of years --"

Just a care-free, light-hearted slip of a girl is Colombe until the network of political intrigue closes in upon her. Without any experience in such things, she is called

upon to play her part in the game of guile and greed begun by those about her. At her first and, we feel sure, her last trial, she is found to be of true steel. Her character unfolds in the course of a few hours, to depths of courage, nobility, and wisdom hitherto unsuspected; and the play leaves her a woman not one whit less charming than the girl who began the day.

Where does this inexperienced girl find the courage to rise and confront her danger, the sublety to read the hearts of sycophants and false courtiers, the discernment to select the noble from the base, the wisdom to sacrifice material ease for true love? Yet such is the metamorphosis that we witness in this play.

As we see, "Colombe's Birthday" illustrates admirably the inward tendency of Browning's dramas. All the interest centers in the purely personal and psychological workings of the minds of the various characters. There are too many "asides" in the play which, although they give an insight into the minds of the speakers, slow up the dramatic action. The speeches are so compact and crowded with thought that their meaning is only "the harvest of a quiet eye." Many readings of the text do not exhaust the richness of the thought, so how could one sitting in the theater be sufficient to get the entire beauty of it? How many people seated in a theater for an evening's entertainment would get through the ear the meaning crammed into

these lines of Valence's in Act IV of "Colombe's Birthday"?

"One great aim, like a guiding-star, above --
Which tasks strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift
His manhood to the height that takes the prize;
A prize not near -- lest overlooking earth
He rashly spring to seize it -- nor remote,
So that he rest upon his path content:
But day by day, while shimmering grows shine,
And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,
He sees so much as, just evolving these,
The stateliness, the wisdom, and the strength,
To due completion, will suffice this life,
And lead him at his grandest to the grave;
After this star, out of a night he springs;
A beggar's cradle for the throne of thrones
He quits; so, mounting, feels each step he mounts,
Nor, as from each to each exultingly
He passes, overleaps one grade of joy.
This, for his own good: -- with the world, each gift
Of God and man -- reality, tradition, Fancy
Fancy and fact -- so well environ him,
That as a mystic panoply they serve --
Of force, untenanted, to awe mankind,
And work his purpose out with half the world,
While he, their master, dexterously slipt
From such encumbrance, is meantime employed
With his own prowess on the other half.
Thus shall he prosper, every day's success
Adding, to what is he, a solid strength --
An aery might to what encircles him,
Till at the last, so life's routine lends help,
That as the Emperor only breathes and moves,
His shadow shall be watched, his step or stalk
Become a comfort or a portent, how
He trails his ermine take significance --
Till even his power shall cease to be most power,
And men shall dread his weakness more, nor dare
Peril their earth its bravest, first and best,
Its typified invincibility.
Thus shall he go on, greatening, till he ends --
The man of men, the spirit of all flesh,
The fiery center of an earthly world!" (1)

Here we have a metaphysical discussion of abstract ideas,

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(1) Browning, Robert: Colombe's Birthday, Act IV, Sc. I

hard enough to read, but practically impossible to understand through the ear. It takes more than perseverance to sustain one's attention to the end of this speech -- it takes a high order of intelligence! Do we blame the average theater-goer for passing Browning by?

LURIA

"Luria," the last of the series entitled "Bells and Pomegranates," was published in 1846. It is dedicated to Walter Savage Landor:

> "I dedicate this last attempt for the present at dramatic poetry to a great dramatic poet; 'wishing what I write may be read by his light:' if a phrase originally addressed, by not the least worthy of his contemporaries, to Shakespeare, may be applied here, by one whose sole privilege is in a grateful admiration, to Walter Savage Landor.
>
> Robert Browning." (1)

The words "last attempt" make it very plain that Browning was deliberately laying aside the dramatic medium at thirty-four years of age. He never used it again.

The tragedy of "Luria" is written in five acts, but each act contains only one scene. In this play Browning has observed the so-called Aristotelian unities. The action occurs in one day, running from morning in Act I to night in Act V. The scene of the action during the entire

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(1) Browning, Robert: Poetical Works; Cambridge Edit; edited by H.E.Scudder, preface to "Luria."

five acts is in Luria's camp between Florence and Pisa. The time of the action is about 1405, during the war between those two great cities. The play was never acted and hence belongs to the type known as closet drama.

Luria, a Moorish soldier, is commander-in-chief of the Florentine forces; and Tiburzio, commander of the Pisans. Though valiant, brave, and loyal, Luria is surrounded by a web of intrigue, jealousy, suspicion, and espionage. Puccio, the former commander displaced by the government, is now second in command, and jealously he records from time to time his criticisms of Luria's generalship. These notes he has given to the commissary of the republic of Florence, the subtle, sly Braccio, not realizing that they are being used to poison Luria's reputation and to bring him into dishonor with the republic that he is serving so valiantly.

"BRACCIO. Charges, I say not whether false or true,
Have been preferred against you some time since,
Which Florence was bound, plainly, to receive,
And which are therefore undergoing now
The due investigation. That is all.
I doubt not but your innocence will prove
Apparent and illustrious, as to me,
To them this evening, when the trial ends,
LURIA. My trial?
DOMIZIA. Florence, Florence to the end,
My whole heart thanks thee!
PUCCIO. [To Braccio.] What is 'trial,' sir?
It was not for a trial, -- surely, no --
I furnished you those notes from time to time?
I held myself aggrieved -- I am a man --
And I might speak, -- ay, and speak mere truth, too,
And yet not mean at bottom of my heart

What should assist a -- trial, do you say?
You should have told me!" (1)

Braccio is absolutely incapable of understanding Luria's unselfish devotion to Florence, and paints him, in his dispatches, as a self-seeking traitor.

The Pisan Tiburzio admires Luria as a foeman worthy of his steel, honest and valiant in the field of honor. He has intercepted Braccio's dispatches, and tries to warn Luria of the treachery of the Florentines whom he serves. He urges him to join the Pisans, and to his entreaties are added those of the Lady Domizia, who wishes to make Luria the instrument of her revenge upon the republic that has ruined her noble house. The temptation to desert Florence is mighty, but the Moor remains true to his trust and wins the battle which, even his enemies admit, saves Florence. Instead of admiration and homage, Luria receives for his reward the news that he is being tried for treason, and that the sentence will arrive in camp that night.

Again comes the temptation to crush Florence. But his love for that fair city is too strong.

"LURIA. I ruin Florence, teach her friends mistrust,
Confirm her enemies in harsh belief,
And when she finds one day, as find she must,
The strange mistake, and how my heart was hers,
Shall it console me, that my Florentines
Walk with a sadder step, in graver guise,
Who took me with such frankness, praised me so,
At the glad outset?" (2)

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(1) Browning, Robert: Luria; Act III
(2) Ibid.: Act IV

Luria prefers to destroy himself. He swallows a little vial of poison which he had brought with him from his own land in case of capture or dishonor. Now, in the hour of his splendid victory, he turns to it as the only way out of the desperate web woven by lies about him:

"LURIA. [Taking a phial from his breast.] Strange!
This is all I brought from my own land
To help me: Europe would supply the rest,
All needs beside, all other helps save one!
I thought of adverse fortune, battle lost,
The natural upbraiding of the loser,
And then this quiet remedy to seek
At end of the disastrous day. [He drinks.] 'Tis sought!
This was my happy triumph-morning: Florence
Is saved: I drink this, and ere night, -- die! Strange!" (1)

Knowing that his time of life is short, Luria instructs Puccio how to finish his campaign, and the Florentine, good and noble at heart, realizes how blinded he has been with jealousy. He is overcome by the sense of his own unworthiness and begs to be allowed to accompany Luria to death or into exile. The Moor tells him, however, that there is a potent friend who is soon to help him out of all difficulty. One by one, like Puccio, all Luria's enemies realize with shame their duplicity and his magnanimity. Calmly Luria waits sentence. It comes at last -- complete exoneration. Tiburzio had gone to Florence and convinced the court of Luria's nobility. Florence is ready now to heap her honors upon her deliverer, but it is too late,

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(1) Browning, Robert: Luria; Act IV

for the great soldier already is dead.

Luria is a hero-play with the character of Luria the central and dominating interest. All other people in the play, as well as the details in the action, serve but as instruments by means of which the nobility, strength, and sincerity of this great soul are made apparent.

The play is not suited to the theater -- it is totally lacking in action. In form, it approaches the dramatic monologue, and many of the speeches are so long that they are almost monologues in themselves. There is plenty of mental action, but that is not visible to the eye of the expectant spectator. In the midst of the plots and counter-plots about him, wronged by the suspicions of Braccio, by the jealousies of Puccio, and by the intrigues of Domizia, we see Luria, the simple, honest man fall an innocent victim to the malice combined against him. But the spectator sees no rush of dramatic movement on the stage before him; there is no series of stirring events for the eye to follow; no dramatic situations to thrill to; there is nothing of scenic interest, with the sole exception of Luria's drinking the fatal poison alone in his tent.

The speeches are far too long for stage dialogue; the soliloquies run to great length and obscurity. When drama is living on the stage, the talk is forcibly minimized, but, in this play, we have a soliloquy of fifty-

two lines by Domizia beginning the second act, and Act IV ends with a self-analysis of eighty lines delivered by Luria.

Reasons for Browning's Failure in the Theater

The dramatic action in all of Browning's dramas is halted very often by the inability of the audience to grasp his meaning. A steady flow of long speeches, the sentences of which are perplexingly involved, makes, certainly, an unrelaxing demand upon the intelligence of the average theater goer. Not only the intellect but the imagination of the auditor must be alert, too. A reader can cast his eye back over the printed page, but to the audience an unintelligible sentence is lost forever, and, with it, often, the whole thought of the speech. This constant demand upon us exhausts our power of attention in a short time. The ordinary man of the theater-going type is incapable of such a sustained effort, such mental alertness. We feel a sense of terrific pressure, a cramming of matter into us, and we give way under the strain. We feel a sense of irritation at what gives us such a sense of inferiority, and, after all, a play should first and foremost give enjoyment. Browning gives us too much concentrated matter -- every line of the play is packed as full of thought as a line can be. At best we but apprehend his meaning received through the ear, even though we listen with an almost agonizing tensity. Probably no other dram-

atist has ever made such heavy demands upon the intelligence of both actor and audience as Browning. This obscurity would, with the average audience, detract from the total impression aimed at by the author.

"Robert Browning's poetry is certainly very hard reading, like Cowley's and Dr. Donne's. But the difference between him and such obscurists is, that with the earlier poets, both the style and the sentiment were equally conceits -- while Browning's style is the naturally quaint form of a subtle or sinewy thought. . . The fact of occasional obscurity is not to be denied. Upon the whole, Browning's poetry is harder to follow than that of any other great English poet. But the chief reason is, that he boldly aims to express what is, in its nature, so evanescent and shadowy -- to put into words processes of thought and feeling, so delicately inwrought and fluctuating that only sharp self-observers and students of human character can pursue them." (1)

However, we cannot condone obscurity in a dramatist. Great art does not preclude simplicity. Into "Faust" entered the quintessence of fifty years' experience and meditation of one of the profoundest thinkers the modern world has produced. "Wilhelm Meister" contains more food for reflection than most of the treatises on ethics, but the impression upon the audience is deep, profound, and unified. We never feel that we are "in the dark" as to the author's meaning, neither are we left "in the dark" as to Shakespeare's meaning.

"The art of Shakespeare, as I understand it, is large, noble, and obvious. We are never in doubt as to his intention. There are heights in him, perhaps, which

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(1) Putnam's Magazine, April, 1856; vol. VII

few of us can hope to scale, and depths which our plummets fail to sound; but, in the main, he is equable. We can understand his characters and his situations. Hamlet is not too profound for us, in spite of the mist with which the critics have contrived to surround him; and we readily perceive the difference between the innate jealousy of Leontes and the deceived credulity of Othello. Lear, the most stupendous of mortal creations, is a man fashioned like unto ourselves. Even Ariel and Caliban are within the range of our sympathies. I do not feel this to be the case with the dramatis personae of Mr. Browning. Some few of them I understand, many I do not pretend to. Even these last, however, sometimes give me an insight into the human nature they do not embody -- clews leading into dark passages and long labyrinths -- the sudden opening of doors with lightning-like glimpses of chambers beyond. In an instant the doors are shut, the clew is dropped, and I am in the dark." (1)

Another critic, George Barrett Smith, writes:

"His genius is powerful, but irritating; his poems are full of entangling meshes for the unwary reader; they are a thorn in the side of this desultory generation. Men like to have the reputation of understanding him, but are unwilling to go through the necessary amount of intellectual labor for the purpose. Critics enlarge upon his perversities of thought and diction, and yet, when all has been said against him that critical ingenuity or popular feeling can suggest, it is universally admitted that this distinguished poet's works, with all their manifest defects, are charged with passages of the very loftiest order of poetry . . His soul has always been aflame with poetic thought; and his ideal and goal have never consisted in mere popular applause. He has sung because he must, and given to his song that articulation of which he was capable." (2)

In the face of this testimony to Browning's obscurity, it is interesting to hear an absolute denial of the charge by Swinburne:

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(1) Stoddard, Richard Henry: Paper on Browning; Appleton's Journal, Nov 11, 1871; vol. VI

(2) Smith, George Barrett: Paper on Browning; International Review, vol. VI, page 176

"If there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect, it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind, or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity. . . . The very essence of Mr. Browning's aim and method, as exhibited in the ripest fruits of his intelligence, is such as implies above all other things the possession of a quality the very reverse of obscurity -- a faculty of spiritual illumination rapid and intense and subtle as lightning, which brings to bear upon its central object by way of direct and vivid illustration every symbol and detail on which its light is flashed in passing." (1)

Dowden sets forth very well the kind of obscurity which we accept in a great drama.

"For obscure all great art is, -- not with the perplexity of subtle speculation, but with the mystery of vital movement. How complex soever the character of some dramatis personae, for instance, may be, if it has been elaborated in the intellect, another intellect can make it out. How simple soever it be, if the writer has made it his own by a complete sympathy, it is real and therefore inexhaustibly full of meaning. It seems very easy to understand Shakespeare's 'Miranda' or Goethe's 'Clarchen', they appear quite simple conceptions; yet we never entirely comprehend them, any more than we do the simplest real human being, and so we return to them again and again ever finding something new. They are as clear as the sea, which tempts us to look down and down into its unresisting depths, but like the sea they live and move, and their pure abysses baffle the eye.

"Hence it is that the artistic product, -- the work of art, -- is far richer than any intellectual gift the artist or even the philosopher can offer. It rests not so much on any views of life (all views of life are unfortunately one-sided) as on a profound sympathy with life in certain individual forms; and in proportion as the whole nature of the artist is lost in his work, -- his perceptive

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(1) Swinburne, Algernon Charles: Robert Browning

powers, his sensuous impulses, his reason, his imagination, his emotions, his will, -- the conscious activity and unconscious energy interpenetrating one another -- his work comes forth full, not of speculation, but what is so much better, of life, the open secret of art." (1)

Contemporary criticism is always interesting, and this one is especially pertinent here:

"To me (and it may be from my own obtuseness) much of Mr. Browning's poetry is altogether unimtelligible; his meaning and aims seeming like Gratiano's reasons, -- as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you shall seek all day ere you find them, and, when you have found them, they are not worth the search. In this my opinion long ago entertained, I am glad to be fortified by an admirable article in the 'Edinburgh Review' of October 1864, of which I will quote a few lines: --'The age now appears to be ripe for some Theory of the Obscure, which, like Pope's famous Treatise on Pathos, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry, might be copiously illustrated from the works of contemporary poets, and afford at least a warning to the young aspirant for the honors of verse. For such a book, Mr. Browning's volumes would form an inexhaustible mine of examples; and the last volume which he has published is perhaps richer than any that have preceded it in materials for such a purpose.' Again:-- 'It was said of an eminent lawyer that he wrote his opinions in three different kinds of hand-writing, -- one which he and his clerk could read, another which only he himself could decipher, and a third which neither he nor anybody else could make out; and into similar categories are we compelled to parcel out the poems of the Dramatis Personae of Mr. Browning.'" (2)

Browning himself tells us how he feels on this subject:

"I can have little doubt that my writing has been in the main too hard for many I should have been pleased to communicate with; but I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed. On the other hand, I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar or a game at dominoes to an idle man. So, perhaps, on the whole I get my desserts, and some-

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(1) Dowden, Edward: Studies in Literature, page 193

(2) Cleveland, Charles D. : English Literature of the Nineteenth Century, page 716

thing over -- not a crowd but a few I value more." (1)

Unfortunately, for Browning's dramas, public theaters do not exist for the few but the many. Browning's theory seems to be that the reader has no rights which the author is bound to respect. This is not a good idea for a playwright to work upon. Naturally, it did not lead to his ready or cordial acceptance by the public. Such an attitude toward the reader of the printed page who has the leisure to turn back, to compare and to reflect, maybe justifiable, but hardly is it fair to the listener who must catch at once the meaning of what is uttered. The attention of the audience must be so closely given to what is said and done at the moment that there is neither time, opportunity, nor inclination to consider what has gone before.

There is, of course, no great play but what, at the first reading or hearing, something will be found to have escaped the attention of the most intelligent and interested. There are sentences in "Hamlet" which one can never fathom. But in the case of a real dramatist like Shakespeare, these occasional obscurities do not interfore with our comprehension of the play as a whole. Our appreciation may deepen, it is true, but our comprehension of the play is as satisfactory at our first hearing as it is at the one hundred and first.

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(1) Barras, William Avery: Selections from Browning, Introduction

"From emotions to emotions is the formula for any good play," says Professor Baker, not from mental gymnastics to mental gymnastics. One critic says of Browning that "the best way of obtaining an impression of what was going on was to take care not to follow the speech too closely, but to hear the opening of a sentence and supply the remainder by imagination."

William J. Rolfe, the famous Shakespearian editor, speaks of a certain remoteness in Browning's handling of his characters. He says:

> "Even the earliest of these dramas -- 'Strafford' and 'Pippa Passes,' for example -- have a quality which, for want of a better name, we must call 'remoteness.' As compared with the men and women of Shakespeare, these are removed from us by a perceptible distance. A marked difference is noticeable in the various plays of Shakespeare in this respect. 'The Tempest' is much more remote than 'The Merchant of Venice,' though both deal with situations unusual to our experience. It is easy to see that, in some plays, for a definite artistic reason, the characters act their parts as if on a deep stage at a considerable distance from the audience; while in others they crowd up to the very footlights to speak to us.
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> "Browning is, even in his early career, more in love with this effect of remoteness than Shakespeare, and it becomes finally his most noticeable characteristic. In 'A Soul's Tragedy' the characters are so real as to be almost identified with our own selves, yet we see them at a distance so great that one feels the stage to be the clouds of heaven, over which the actors walk as on a pavement." (1)

Browning enthusiasts usually attribute the failure of his plays to the many complications experienced in staging his drama, and to the disagreement which arose between

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(1) Rolfe, William J.: Browning's "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon"; pages 10-11 of the Introduction

the author and the actor, Macready. These things, they feel, are responsible solely for the half success of his plays, and are responsible, also, for Browning's abandonment of the dramatic form altogether. This explanation, although it might explain the half success of his plays during the author's life time, does not explain their failure ever since that time. To anyone who reads Browning's plays carefully in chronological order, the reason for their lack of appeal to the popular taste is most apparent. His plays grow steadily less and less dramatic as he goes on, and approach more and more the form which he made so entirely his own, -- I mean, of course, the dramatic monologue. In "Colombe's Birthday" and "A Soul's Tragedy," there is scarcely anything deserving the name of action! We have already seen how deficient in action are "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" and "Strafford." Compared with a lyric poet like Robert Burns, Browning certainly is objective and dramatic, but we characterize him as such only by comparison. By a comparison with Shakespeare, we decide that his sense of the dramatic did not extend to the drama but was limited to the monologue -- in this form he has no superior in English literature. But the dramatic monologue is only allied to drama; it is not drama itself. It aims at a revelation of character through the soliloquy, or through the soliloquy broken only by occasional interrogation. Without speaking of any other of its various failures to meet

the requirements of the stage, it excludes action entirely. Since Aristotle, action has been recognized as a vital requisite of the drama, essential to its very existence. Browning's failure to estimate its importance was fatal to the success of his plays. In the monologue, however, we do not have action but merely a story, a story which either suggests action to come or is suggested by action that has passed. Taken together, Browning's monologues represent a mighty pageant of the history of the soul in which there passes by us scene after scene, each depicting an incident in its development.

It might be objected, here, that Shakespeare's tragedies are all studies of a soul caught in the throes of a great passion. Macbeth, for instance, is dominated by the overwhelming passion of an inordinate ambition; Othello is ravaged by the fierce torments of an all-consuming jealousy. But in Shakespeare we see, not Macbeth alone, but Macbeth's traitorous and murderous resolve struggling against Banquo's fearless intrepitude, against Macduff's militant loyalty. More gripping still in its intensity is the clash of Macbeth's higher nature against the evil which, with a horrible premonition, it knows will be its ultimate doom. Again, it is not the murderous heart of the false fratricide, Claudius, that is of paramount importance to us. We are even more concerned in watching the terrible cobra-like coils of his deed widen out until they

have caught in their toils the innocent Ophelia, the rash Laertes, the meddlesome Polonius, the frail Queen, and the procrastinating Hamlet himself. It is, then, the action and interaction of souls, the clash of wills, the desires and ideals of the heart finding expression in action that seems, in Shakespeare, to set in motion a whole host of spiritual forces which seize upon our imaginations, agitate our emotions, and affect us to the profoundest depths of our beings. This Browning does not do. He shows us not the action of one soul upon another, but the soul moving in itself, often in its most secret windings and hidden sanctuaries. It is as if the soul paused for delineation before action or after it, now alone, now in relation to another soul, now face to face with its God.

So we have in Browning not the action of a man like Homer's Ulysses or Shakespeare's Macbeth, but the soul of the artist, the thoughts of the lover, the reflections of the priest. We see, then, that Browning's "inward" tendency constitutes the strength of his monologue and the weakness of his dramas. We might say that in his strength lies his limitation. This "inward" tendency, too, results, even more fatally for his success in the drama in an inability to give to his plots that sense of inevitable development that they should have to command our interest. To the average playgoer, the lack of sustained interest is the unpardonable sin of drama. The born dramatist, like the

orator, has his eye always upon his audience; yet this was just what Browning refused to do. He seemed to keep his eyes deliberately averted. His plays are to be read and studied -- not to be listened to with emotion and enjoyment.

Not one of Browning's plays is a piece of good dramatic workmanship. Indeed, in order to call him a playwright his admirers have to invent a distinction between a dramatic author and a playwright. This distinction seems based upon the theory that a genuine dramatic author cannot produce a play with which an ordinary audience has anything in common. So, we find it the proud boast of some of his partisans that his dramatic writings do not appeal to the multitude. They are cariar to the general! Browning certainly illustrates the difference between a great poet and a great poet, like Shakespeare, who is also a great playwright.

There is one striking difference between Browning and Shakespeare which will point out, if not the cause, at least the fact of his failure on the stage. Contemporary evidence proves to us beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Shakespeare was the most popular playwright of his time. Not only did his plays appeal to his own day and people, but they have continued to make an appeal to every generation since then. Moreover, his popularity is not confined to the English speaking race nor to the few

and the select. However, this is not true of Browning. Quite the contrary, he did not appeal to the stage of his own day nor to that of our more modern day. At present he shows no hope for future favor. There is not, nor ever was, any popular demand for Browning in the theater. Shakespeare won the admiration of his audience because he considered them. He gave them what they wanted, though in a sublimated form it is true. What is "Hamlet" but the popular sixteenth century tragedy of blood idealized to the highest degree?

It is interesting to conjecture what might have been the result to the drama if Macready and Browning had not severed relations, and if Browning had not turned away from the stage. Certainly, if Shakespeare had died in his "play cobbling" years, he would not be hailed now as the greatest dramatic interpreter of the English speaking race. We wonder if Browning had served an apprenticeship in the theater if he, too, would have developed a sensitivity for the theatrically effective. However, conjectures are very often a form of "wishful thinking," and from the actual realities that we have been considering, we are forced to conclude that Browning's forte does not lie in the drama. The truth is that far from being a great dramatist, he is no dramatist at all. It is in the dramatic monologue alone, as we have said before, that he achieves his success. No great poet who has set out to

write plays has failed more hopelessly than he to master the technique of dramatic art. None has shown so little comprehension of those details of construction and arrangement and expression which unite to make a play successful on the stage. As we have seen in our analyses of his plays, Browning was not a technician. He was guilty of the crudest inconsistencies, the most obvious defects and weaknesses. In fact, his ignorance of his medium is astonishing. Of course, there are many "purple patches," but no play can be kept alive merely by powerful passages. A successful dramatist must have more than a keen sense of the dramatic. A novelist like Scott or Dickens or Thomas Hardy possesses that. He must have what has been called a flair for the theater. Browning's poetic plays fail, not because he was not a poet, but because he was not a man of the theater. To write successful poetic drama for the stage, and for the public that sits in judgment in front of it, one must be not merely a great poet but a great playwright as well.

It does not seem, then, that Browning's failure can be laid at the door of the poetic form which he used as his medium. The second act of "A Soul's Tragedy," which is written in prose, is no more successful than the first act, which is written in blank verse. The medium in either case is not responsible for the play's lack of popular appeal. There are too many weaknesses inherent

in all the dramas themselves to warrant the view that the poetic medium was an insurmountable impediment in the way of popularity. We conclude that he failed to write successful drama for the obvious reason that he was not a playwright, not a man of the theater.

Clayton Hamilton says: "When a play, owing to altered physical conditions, is tossed out of the theater, it will find a haven in the closet only if it be greatly written." Browning was tossed rather prematurely into the closet by the audiences of his own day. However, succeeding generations read most of his poetic plays (I still except "Strafford") because they are good poetry, if they do not revive them because they are good drama. After all, they serve to embody his interpretation of life, which is, perhaps, all that Browning wished them to do.

Browning will have to wait for his audience until the drama

"Peradventure may ourgrow,
The simulation of the painted scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume,
And take for a nobler stage the soul itself,
In shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences,
To keep the pauses of the rhthmic sounds." (1)

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(1) Browning, Elizabeth Barrett: Aurora Leigh, Fifth Book

THE POETICAL DRAMAS OF BULWER-LYTTON

Bulwer-Lytton, like Robert Browning, seems to have turned his attention to the stage at the suggestion of Macready. One of his biographers writes:

> "Friendly relations with Mr. Macready, and admiration for that actor's gallant attempt to advance his art, turned Bulwer's attention to the stage, but the circumstances of the time influenced the shaping of the works, the selection of effects, and even the language in which they were expressed." (1)

Evidently, when a young boy, Bulwer had been fired by Macready's acting and the actor always remained a romantic figure to him. Here is a letter which he wrote to his friend, John Forster, Christmas, 1855, which gives us an inkling of the hero worship which, as a boy, he had extended to the actor. To Forster he writes:

> "Through you I first heard Macready, heard Hamlet, heard Macbeth (his Macbeth, how fine it was!), and Jacques at Arden. 'O ducdame, ducdame, to get back into the circle and be a fool forever'." (2)

Evidently, these excursions to the play with a friend like Forster were to the impressionable young boy not only thrilling adventures but a great stimulus to his imagination, too. Macready evidently must have taken on a nimbus of distinction which he never lost through all their later years of friendship.

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(1) BELL, E.G.: Introductions to the Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer-Lytton

(2) Ibid.

Friendship between Bulwer and Macready

It must have been a great pleasure for the man Bulwer to meet this actor whom his boyhood enthusiasm had soidealized. We have a record of their first meeting in Macready's famous diary:

"October 31st. -- Met at Colonel D'Aguilar's Bulwer, whom I liked very much; . . . Bulwer was quite what Sheil described him, very good-natured, and of course intelligent. . . I urged Bulwer to write a play; he told me he had written one, great part of which was lost, on the death of Cromwell. Bulwer offered to set me down, and hoped to meet me in London."

"June 9th. -- Letter from Bulwer at some length, excusing himself from dining here on Sunday. One expression in his letter I disliked -- the 'honour of my acquaintance'. My acquaintance can be no honour to such a man as Bulwer, and it almost seems like irony."(1)

Macready's humility is no more delightful than Bulwer's reverence, carried forward from boyhood. Evidently their chance introduction ripened immediately into a mutual regard, and Bulwer's interest was caught by the life work of his actor friend. So it was that the versatile writer turned his attention to the drama and began a new chapter in his varied literary career.

The play "Cromwell", which Macready mentions, was finished and submitted to the actor for criticism. Macready found it unsatisfactory, and Bulwer continued to work upon it for some time to come. Eventually, he arrived

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(1) MACREADY, W.C.: Reminiscences, edited by Sir Frederick Pollock

at the conclusion that it was not dramatic material, and gave it up entirely.

THE DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE

On February 23, 1836, however, Bulwer had the good news for Macready that he had written him another play, which he had dedicated to the great actor himself. The two men were at Bulwer's rooms, and the highly-emotional actor was so overcome with gratitude at the great compliment paid to him that he describes himself as "affected to tears." He says in his diary:

"February 23rd. -- . . . Called on Bulwer, whom I found in very handsome chambers in the Albany. He told me, after talking about 'The Provost of Bruges', and recalling our conversation in Dublin, that he had written a play: that he did not know whether I might think the part intended for me worthy of my powers, for that inevitably the weight of the action fell upon the woman; that the subject was La Vallière. He handed me a paper, in which I read it was dedicated to myself. It almost affected me to tears. I could not read it. He wished me to read the play, give my opinion, and that he would make any alterations I might suggest. I appointed to see him tomorrow.

"February 24th. -- Read very attentively over the play of 'La Vallière' and made my notes upon what I thought it needed.

"February 25th. -- Called on Bulwer; we talked over the play, and I mentioned my objections, at the same time suggesting some remedies. He yielded to all readily except the fifth act; upon that he seemed inclined to do battle; but at length I understood him to yield." (1)

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(1) MACREADY, W.C.: Reminiscences, edited by Sir Frederick Pollock

The new play, Bulwer-Lytton's first offering to the stage, was called "The Duchess de la Vallière." After studying the play carefully, Macready seemed to feel that the part of Louise overshadowed his role. Macready, and one can hardly censure him, selected plays which provided him with a character study worthy of his great histrionic ability. Naturally, it must have been a keen disappointment to him to have the feminine lead completely eclipse his role, especially in a play dedicated to him. Bell has this description of the personality of the great actor:

> "Mr. Macready was a great actor and an accomplished scholar, somewhat imperious and self-opinionated, jealous of his prerogatives as head of his profession, and afflicted with an ungovernable temper, which caused him much mortification, for he was a pious man, and his stormy ebullitions were followed by periods of deep humiliation, contrition, and fears of divine wrath which his prayers could not assuage." (1)

Wishing to satisfy Macready, Bulwer enlarged the part of the monk Bragelone but, in doing so, he spoiled the artistic symmetry of the play, and increased it in length until the time taken to perform it was four hours. Naturally, a playwright's problem is condensation not expansion. Concentration gives the plot energy, swift movement, life itself, but an excess in speech and incident only produces weariness and boredom. In expanding his play to

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(1) BELL, E. G.: Prose Romances, Plays, and Comedies of Bulwer

give the character of Bragelone more prominence, the author lost the vigor and terseness necessary to its effectiveness. When Bulwer published the play, he printed it as he had written it originally, discarding the changes made at Macready's request. Bulwer always felt that if the play had been produced in its original form, it would have found success instead of failure.

The original play had been published in the autumn of 1836, and had reached a second edition before the end of the year. Altered to suit Macready, it was performed at Covent Garden on January 4, 1837. Macready gives us an interesting account of the premiere in his diary:

> "January 4th. -- . . . Acted Bragelone well, with earnestness and freshness; some passages were deficient in polich. Being called for, I did not choose to go on without Miss Faucit, whom I led forward. The applause was fervent, but there had been considerable impatience manifested through the play, which did not end until 11 o'clock! Dow, Fitzgerald, Browning, Talfourd, and his son Frank, C. Buller, came into my room; they all seemed to think much of my performance. Bulwer came in when they had gone, and in the most energetic and ardent manner thanked me for my performance, and for making him cut out the first scene of the fifth act, which I had done. . . Bulwer drove me home; all his talk was 'La Vallière'." (1)

Unfortunately the play did not fulfil the promise of the first night. Although praised by people of taste and discernment, it was not received with enthusiasm by

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(1) MACREADY, W. C.: Reminiscences

the general public, and after nine performances, in spite of Macready's wish to continue the play, it was withdrawn at the request of the author.

The following letter written by Disraeli to Lady Blessington, a great friend of Bulwer's, although it bears no date, appears to refer to "The Duchess de la Vallière."

"My dear Lady -- We have all here been dying of an epidemic; Tita and myself being the only persons who have escaped. I trust that it has not reached Kensington Gore. All this district are prostrate. I fear for you. D'Orsay, I know, immortal youth, is never indisposed. I ascribe my exemption to a sort of low gentleman-fever that has had hold of me ever since I came down here, and which is not very inconvenient. I have in consequences never left the house, scarcely my room, and it has not incapacitated me from a little gentle scribbling. I am about something in a higher vein than the last; what you and E.L.B. would call 'worthy of me', alias unpopular.

"I am sorry about Bulwer's play. I would not write to him, as I detest sympathy, save with good fortune; but I am sorry, very, and for several reasons. 1st, because he is my friend; 2ndly, because he is the only literary man whom I do not abominate and despise; 3dly, because I have no jealousy on principle (not from feeling), since I think always the more the merrier, and his success would probably have assisted mine; 4thly, because it proves the public taste lower even than I imagined it, if indeed there can be a deeper still than my estimate; 5thly, because from the extracts which have met my eye (in the Examiner) the play seems excellent, and far the best poesie that he has yet relieved himself of; 6thly, because there seems to have been a vast deal of disgusting cant upon the occasion; 7thly, because he is a good fellow, and 8thly -- I forget the 8th argument, but it was a very strong one. However, the actors of the present day are worse even than the authors -- that I knew before, but Ed. B. would not believe it, and I could pardon his scepticism. -As for myself, I have locked up my melodrama in the strong box with my love-letters; both being productions only interesting to the writer.

"I have received several letters from Lord Lyndhurst who has sent me Henrietta Temple from Paris, price 4s. and 2d.; an agreeable present, proving the value of our copyrights to London publishers. It is a vile trade, but what is better? Not politics. I look forward to the coming campaign with unmitigated disgust; and should certainly sell out, only one's enemies would say one had failed, to say nothing of one's friends. The fact is I am too much committed to the fray to retire at present, but, oh! that I had the wings of a dove, etc.

"Lord L. will be with us in a week. I feel interested in his career, more than in my own, for he is indeed the most amiable of men, tho' that is not very high praise, you will say. Ah, méchante! I see the epigram on your lips.

"I really grieve if I said anything which deserved the lecture you gave me, tho' I am almost glad I merited it, if only for its kindness. I was rather harassed when I was last in town, as you know, and have a disagreeable habit of saying everything I feel; but I love my friends and am not naturally suspicious or on the alert to quarrel about straws. I am here pretty well and have my rooms and my time to myself, but still there is a family, tho' an amiable and engaging one; and the more I feel, the more I am convinced that man is not a social animal. Remember me to D'O. and E.L.B.; to nobody else, and -- Believe me, Yours,

Dis." (1)

"The playwright should consult his tools, the actors," says Goethe, "for their practical knowledge of stage-craft enables them to estimate the effectiveness of groupings and situations and they can often suggest improving changes in the arrangement and presentation of a play." Bulwer evidently agreed with Goethe for he revised most of his plays to suit Macready's suggestions.

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, first Lord Lytton

Several times, notably in "The Lady of Lyons", he made extensive changes, even though he did not see the necessity for them. Macready's judgment was not infallible. In his production of "King Lear" he omitted the Fool, which could hardly be called a happy improvement on Shakespeare. As far as he could, Bulwer tried to write with Macready and his company in mind, and to create such a character as the actor would enjoy portraying.

Brander Matthews in his excellent chapter "The Influence of the Actor" has a good many interesting anecdotes to relate of the reciprocity between dramatist and actor. We know that Shakespeare wrote with the stock company at the Globe in mind. It was Richard Burbage, not Hamlet, who was "fat and short of breath." Molière gave some of his own physical characteristics to his dramatic characters. Sheridan confessed that he left the love scene out of his "School for Scandal" because the two leads in the Drury Lane stock company at that time could not make love. Rostand provided Coquelin with his long desired death scene in "Cyrano de Bergerac." Madam de Sévigné accused Racine of writing plays for Mademoiselle Champmesle and not for posterity. Belasco said that, as he wrote his "Girl of the Golden West", he could hear the beautiful voice of Blanche Bates saying the lines. So, in writing with actual actors and actresses in mind, Bulwer-Lytton was but obeying one of the accepted

traditions of the theater.

The following letter to Forster shows us the way in which Bulwer wrote with the different members of Macready's company in mind:

"Aix-la-Chapelle is detestable; but I continue to improve though gradually. All literary labour is sternly interdicted -- but I creep on two or three pages a day with the Play. I fancy it is comedy and so far in a new genre that it certainly admits stronger and more real grave passion than the comedy of the last century. But is not that true to the time? Are we not more in earnest than our grandfathers? I want most especially Mrs. Glover. I have a widow, always gay and good-humored, in love with Mr. Doleful, always cynical and wretched. Mrs. Clifford, could not do it; for there must be some comeliness, or something to do instead. Is Mrs. Orger available? but nothing like Mrs. Glover. Macready's part is individualized, but difficult to act at present, alternations too quick from gaiety to passion. I shall oil him all over before I've done. I am now in Act 3, which I intend to end with Crockford's or some other Club. I must have an exact picture of a real Club. I have admitted many allusions to present manners, etc., throughout. But whether the whole will do I cannot say till I come to Act 5, where I see great difficulty and the want of a sudden catastrophe." (1)

Of the many playwrights who, at one time or another in their careers, had dealings with Macready, Bulwer was the only one who never resented his criticisms, and always asked and honored his suggestions. Browning, as we have seen, became estranged from the actor after the failure of the "Blot in the 'Scutcheon." If Bulwer had behaved in a similar fashion, his friendship with

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton

the actor would have cooled after the failure of "The Duchess de la Vallière." Bulwer behaved in a far different fashion. Although he felt that the failure of the play was due in great measure to the execrable acting of some minor characters and to the changes made at Macready's suggestion, he did not change one iota in his affection toward the actor. Their warm friendship continued until their deaths which, curiously enough, occurred in the same year. Macready was a frequent visitor at Knebworth, and Bulwer's admiration for the Roscius of his day never faltered.

Bulwer's gruelling dramatic experiences, however, destroyed whatever illusions he may once have had regarding the stage. He discouraged his son's desire to write plays. He felt that it would absorb and vulgarize him. Its success, he said, carried with it neither honor nor renown, and its damnation is infernal. To Sir William Fraser, who asked his counsel about a contemplated play, he said: "I feel sure that you would write a very good comedy. I feel, also, certain that you would sit in the stalls perspiring with horror at the manner in which it was played."

As "The Duchess de la Vallière" stands now in Bulwer's collected dramas, it is not the version played at Covent Gardan. That has not been preserved and, therefore, we cannot tell how the version which

incorporated Macready's suggestions would affect us. The original version is, however, in my humble opinion, a well-constructed, appealing play. It has, to be sure, certain limitations, but I think it infinitely superior to his second play, "The Lady of Lyons," the success of which left nothing to be desired. In "The Duchess de la Vallière" Bulwer's scenic effects have been planned carefully to suit the love of the spectacular so prevalent at that time. The fifth scene of the first act will serve as an illustration of the elaborate stage settings planned. The directions prefixed to the scene read:

Scene V.

"Night -- the Gardens of Fontainebleau, brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps -- Fountains, vases, and statues in perspective* -- A pavilion in the background -- to the right the Palace of Fontainebleau, illuminated. Enter Courtiers, Ladies, etc.

* The effect of the scene should be principally made jets-d'eau, waterfalls, etc." (1)

Later when the court festivity is at its height King Louis says:

". . . we have prepared a game
To shame the lottery of this life, wherein
Each prize is neighbour'd by a thousand blanks.
Methinks it is the duty of a monarch
To set the balance right, and bid the wheel
Shower nought but prizes on the hearts he loves.
What ho, there! with a merry music, raise
Fortune, to show how Merit conquers Honours!
[Music]

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Vallière, Act I, Scene 5

[The Pavilion at the back of the stage opens, and discovers the Temple of Fortune superbly illuminated. Fortune; at her feet, a wheel of light; at either hand, a golden vase, over each of which presides a figure -- the one representing Merit, the other Honour.]

LOUIS. Approach, fair dames and gallants! Aye, as now, May Fortune smile upon the friends of Louis!

[The Courtiers and Ladies group around the vases. From the one over which Merit presides they draw lots, and receive in return from Honour various gifts of jewels, etc.] (1)

We can imagine what a gorgeous spectacle this scene could present, with the ladies and gentlemen of the Grand Monarch's court dressed in the beautiful brocades and jewels so characteristic of that period. The effects given us in the cinema production of Booth Tarkington's "Monsieur Beaucaire," the court scenes of which were taken at Versailles, show us what could be done with Bulwer's play if it were picturized. Such lavish splendor is possible in the celluloid drama. However, for stage production, either then or now, the scenery is too elaborate and too varied. The scene of the play opens in the foreground of an old chateau. The countryside shows French vineyards and, in the distance, woods. Here and there, through openings of the foliage, a broad river can be seen, reflecting in its waters the setting sun. On the distant

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Vallière, Act I, Scene 5

horizon rise the grey turrets of the Convent of the Carmelites. Here, as the setting sun bathes the French countryside in evening splendor, tipping even the grim grey Carmelite spires that rise in the distance with crimson fire, young Louise de la Vallière bids a long farewell to her beloved mother, for she is journeying on the morrow to Versailles to become a lady-in-waiting at the royal court. The mother has no fears that the sordidness of the court will corrupt the innocence of her child. Her virtue will be her armor:

"Do I not know thy soul? through every snare
My gentle dove shall 'scape with spotless plumes
Alone in courts, I have no fear for thee: --
Some natures take from Innocence the lore
Experience teaches; and their delicate leaves,
Like the soft plant, shut out all wrong, and shrink
From vice by instinct, as the wise by knowledge;
And such is thine! My voice thou wilt not hear,
But Thought shall whisper where my voice would warn,
And Conscience be thy mother and thy guide!" (1)

Trusting in her virtue, too, is her soldier betrothed, the Marquis de Bragelone:

"I fear not contrast with the courtier-herd;
And thou are not Louise if thou art won
By a smooth outside and a honey'd tongue,
No! when thou seest these hunters after power,
These shadows, minion'd to the royal sun, --
Proud to the humble, servile to the great, --
Perchance thou'lt learn how much one honest heart,
That never wrong'd a friend or shunn'd a foe, --
How much the old hereditary knighthood,
Faithful to God, to glory, and to love,
Outweighs a universe of cringing courtiers!"(2)

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Vallière, Act I, Scene 1
(2) Ibid., Act I, Scene 2

Louise honors Bragelone's bravery, his chivalrous honor, his noble and kindly nature, but her "heart whispers not the love which should be the answer" to his. Bragelone, older than Louise, gives to her fair youth and lovely innocence the homage of one who has seen a far different side of life in camps and court. His love for her is so holy and reverent that, if it were not welcome, his suit would be "tongueless". How well Bulwer paints for us this manly soldier, now in the "autumn" of his life, humbly turning toward the "soft spring" of Louise's fragrance and beauty.

BRAGELONE. . . . . Dear Louise!
Say, canst thou love me? --
LOUISE. -- I! -- love! -- methinks
It is a word that --
BRAGELONE. Sounds upon thy lips
Like 'land' upon the mariner's, and speaks
Of home and rest after a stormy sea.
Sweet girl, my youth has pass'd in camps; and war
Hath somewhat scathed my manhood ere my time.
Our years are scarce well-mated: the soft spring
Is thine, and o'er my summer's waning noon
Grave autumn creeps. Thou say'st 'I flatter!' -- well
Love taught me first the golden words in which
The honest heart still coins its massive ore.
But fairer words, from falser lips, will soon
Make my plain courtship rude. Louise! thy sire
Betroth'd us in thy childhood: I have watch'd thee
Bud into virgin May, and in thy youth
Have seem'd to hoard my own! -- I think of <u>thee</u>
And I am youthful still! The passionate prayer --
The wild idolatry -- the purple light
Bathing the cold earth from a Hebe's urn; --
Yea, all the soul's divine excess which youth
Claims as its own, came back when first I loved thee!
And yet so well I love, that if thy heart
Recoil from mine, -- if but one single wish,
A shade more timid than the fear which ever
Blends trembling twilight with the starry hope

Of maiden dreams, would start thee from our union, --
Speak, and my suit is tongueless! (1)

Sisterly, at the request of her mother, the girl binds her scarf around the soldier's hauberk, bidding him wear it for the sake of one who honors worth.

So Bragelone goes to the wars, and the gay court grows "richer by a young new beauty." Gossip, in the guise of two courtiers, Grammont and Lauzun, begins to whisper that:

"The pretty novice hath conceived a fancy --
A wild, romantic, innocent, strange fancy --
For our young king; a girlish love, like that
Told of in fairy tales. . . " (2)

Louis, flattered and attracted, avows his love to Louise but she declares herself a poor simple girl, who loves her King but honor more. Clasping a diamond bracelet, which he has won at a court festivity, about the arm of De la Valliére, the King proclaims her to the court as his favorite. Royal scandal travels quickly, and soon Bragelone in his camp hears the King's name coupled with that of Mademoiselle de la Valliére. Seeking his betrothed out at Versailles, he is rejoiced to hear her deny the accusation, although she confesses her love for the King. He urges her to flee from the King's desires and seek protection in a convent, her only refuge

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Valliére, Act I, Scene 2
(2) Ibid., Act I, Scene 4

now that she is an orphan. Louise consents, and they depart from the court.

The stage directions to Act II, Scene IV read:

> "The Cloisters of a Convent -- Night -- Thunder and Lightning, the latter made visible through the long oriel windows."

The poor Louise, praying for strength "in time's most desolate hour", hears the royal trumpet at the cloister gates, and sees the King enter to draw her back into the world where sin awaits her. She begs him to depart and leave her in peace, but her great love and his passionate pleading finally overcome her resistance, and she yields helplessly.

Act III shows Louis already beginning to tire of his too constant love whom he has raised to the distinction of a duchess. His petty jealousy at the grief that Louise displays at the news of Bragelone's death speaks his waning love. His vanity and egotism are hurt, and he doubts that he has had her "virgin heart." The beautiful La Vallière has found little gratification in the splendor of her court life to which only her great love for the King binds her. Lauzun, courtier and sycophant, realizing that Louise is no dispenser of royal favors, seizes the chance which the King's displeasure affords to supplant her in the King's affections by Madame de Montespan, a courtizan who will be a more pliant tool in his hands. Louis publicly shows the court that

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La Vallière no longer has his love, and refusing her colors, he places a knot of Madame de Montespan's colors over the royal order upon his breast.

Lauzun seeks the King's permission to marry the forsaken Duchess, thinking thus to repair his fortunes. Louise, realizing that the King's willingness to see her married to another, speaks the death of all her hopes, is utterly desolate. Even the wily, egotistical Lauzun is momentarily affected by her grief:

> LAUZUN. [passing his hand over his eyes] I do swear
> These eyes are moist! And he who own'd this gem
> Casts it away, and cries "divine" to tinsel!
> So falls my hope. My fortunes call me back
> To surer schemes. Before that ray of goodness
> How many plots shrunk, blinded, into shadow!
> Lauzun forgot himself, and dreamt of virtue!(1)

Bragelone, using the false rumor of his death, goes in the guise of a Franciscan friar to seek an audience with the Duchess and to deliver to her a message of forgiveness from her dead betrothed. He recounts her mother's last hours, watched over by Bragelone, who won from the dying mother a blessing instead of a curse for her child. Overcome with the sense of her guilt, she rushes from his presence unable to bear any more. Meanwhile, the King calls upon his deposed favorite to learn how Lauzun's suit has prospered.

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Vallière, Act IV, Scene 2

In the finest scene in the play, Bragelone confronts the heartless, shallow King and lays bare to him his vain, selfish, lustful soul. Not in the language of false courtiers, but as a judge to a culprit, accuser to accused, he denounces this King who sees in virtue and innocence but a plaything for his fancy. Bragelone leaves the King disconcerted, but he quickly recovers himself and bids the Duchess be told of his presence. Louise, calm and steadfast at last, tells him that she will comply with his desire that she marry but that her bridegroom will be a far nobler one than Lauzun.

The last act sees the Duchess de la Vallière with Bragelone in her old childhood home bidding good-bye to the scenes of her early happiness before taking the veil which will withdraw her from this world. When Bragelone discloses his identity, the last weight is lifted from her conscience, and she proceeds to the convent in peace. Meanwhile, Louis has heard that the bridegroom whom Louise has espoused is Christ, and he arrives to see "the Duchess de la Vallière, still dressed in the bridal and gorgeous attire assumed before the taking of the Carmelite veil", descending the altar steps. Again he pleads with her to come back into the world. Bragelone steps between them, but Louise does not need the monk's support. This time, there is no struggle; she is adamant.

DUCH. DE LA VALL. [Raising her arms to Heaven] Father!
at length, I dare to hope for pardon,
For now remorse may prove itself sincere!
Bear witness, Heaven! I never loved this man
So well as now! and never seem's his love
Built on so sure a rock! Upon thine altar
I lay the offering. I revoke the past;
For Louis, Heaven was left -- and now I leave
Louis, when tenfold more beloved, for Heaven!
Ah! pray with me! Be this our latest token --
This memory of sweet moments -- sweet, though sinless!
Ah, pray with me! that I may have till death
The thought -- 'we pray'd together for forgiveness!'
LOUIS. Oh! wherefore never knew I till this hour
The treasure I shall lose! I dare not call thee
Back from the Heaven where thou art half already!
Thy soul demands celestial destinies,
And stoops no more to earth. Be thine the peace,
And mine the penance! Yet these awful walls,
The rigid laws of this severest order,
Yon spectral shapes, this human sepulchre, --
And thou, the soft, the delicate, the highborn,
The adored delight of Europe's mightiest king, --
Thou canst not bear it!
DUCH. DE LA VALL. I have borne much worse --
Thy change and thy desertion! -- Let it pass!
There is no terror in the things without;
Our souls alone the palace or the prison;
And the one thought that I have fled from sin
Will fill the cell with images more glorious,
And haunt its silence with a mightier music,
Than ever throng'd illumined halls, or broke
From harps by mortal strung!
LOUIS. I will not hear thee!
I cannot brave these thoughts. Thy angel voice
But tells me what a sun of heavenly beauty
Glides from the earth, and leaves my soul to darkness.
This is my work! -- 'twas I for whom that soul
Forsook its native element; for me,
Sorrow consumed thy youth, and conscience gnaw'd
That patient, tender, unreproachful heart.
And now this crowns the whole! the priest -- the altar --
The sacrifice -- the victim! Touch me not!
Speak not! I am unmann'd enough already.
I -- I -- I choke! These tears -- let them speak for me.
Now! now thy hand -- farewell! farewell, for ever! (1)
[Exit LOUIS]

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Vallière, Act V, Scene 5

DUCH. DE LA VALL. Be firm, my heart, be firm!
(After a pause, turning to BRAGELONE, with a slight smile)
'Tis past! we've conquer'd!
(The DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE re-ascends to the altar - the crownd close around.) (1)

And so, Louise de la Vallière passes behind the grating of the Carmelite bars, never again to look upon the face of man or woman outside the sisterhood. She has died to the world in which she sinned. Expiation alone remains.

I can readily see that this dénouement, La Valliere's entrance into the Carmelite Order, would be more effective in a Catholic country than in England. In France, for example, the rigor and the austerity of the order would be more fully comprehended, and the audience would have a keener sense of the tragedy of the catastrophe.

The symbolism of this play would probably be lost upon the average audience, but the failure to grasp its spiritual overtones would not interfere in the least with its enjoyment. Most of the people who witness Ibsen fail utterly to grasp the symbolism in his plays. I wonder how many theater-goers can explain the hidden meaning of "The Master Builder"? The young Louise sacrifices everything for love; for love she sets aside the

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: The Duchess de la Vallière, Act V, Scene 5

laws of religion, class, and society. But, stern as these laws are, and fatal as they can be sometimes to the happiness of the individual, to break them brings only misery and disaster upon the offender, no matter what his motives. It is for just such loving natures as Louise that society has built its sheltering walls, and erected its forbidding barriers. Infringement of the laws of society, no matter if the reason be love or lust, brings for the woman only dire consequences. Man's love and faith are not always to be trusted in; the marriage bond will hold when everything else has broken and crumbled away. Society has established it for her protection.

Bragelone is by far the noblest character in the play. Thrown into bold relief against the false, flattering courtiers and the vain, pleasure-loving King, he stands forth every inch a man. Brave and fearless as a soldier, harsh and stern as a denouncer of court shallowness, still is he tender, merciful, and forgiving to the beloved woman who has erred. His simple, manly dignity is appealing and serves to emphasize the decadence of the court nobles, particularly Lauzun.

Lauzun is Shakespearian in his creation, I think, and is the most skilful piece of characterization in the whole play. He symbolizes force of intellect, keenness

of perception, executive ability all inhibited by environment and circumstances and, for lack of outlet, converted into intrigue, wily scheming, falsification, and sycophancy. Born to direct, he stoops to plot; born with the ability to take command and assume power, he is perverted into a fawning courtier. Yet, even environment cannot kill a soul designed for greatness, and ever and again through the twisted thing he is, Bulwer lets us see the man he might have been.

The conflicts that the play presents are tense and gripping -- love and conscience struggle for mastery in Louise; the King's better nature identified with his love for Louise struggles with the moral deterioration which is gradually encroaching upon him and which finds expression in illicit desires; loyalty to his King as a chevalier of France contends with Bragelone's sense of wrong.

At the particular time that "The Duchess de la Valliere" was produced, Bulwer was at the height of his political career, and, naturally, his political enemies seized upon the play as an opportunity for hurling ridicule and abuse at the author. His marital troubles, too, were receiving great notoriety through his wife, whose desire for revenge led her to seek any means of ruining him in the eyes of his countrymen that she could find. These factors may have influenced popular opinion. That Bulwer

believed that they did is evident from the fact that he produced his second play anonymously, not disclosing his authorship until it had been acclaimed an acknowledged success.

Bulwer himself said that the "Duchess de la Vallière" was his best play:

"'The Duchess de la Valliere', the most polished in point of diction, and the highest in point of character, went the first night thr' an ordeal which a play a thousand times better could not have braved unscathed. The practical dramatist knows that there is no fault more perilous to a play than that of being too long; but from some grievous error in stage management the length of mine had been overlooked, and the curtain did not fall till half past eleven! viz: -- nearly two hours after the proper and orthodox close of a five act play. In the next place, the important parts of Lauzun and Louis XIV. were performed by gentlemen whose very ability in their own more peculiar lines made the public less lenient to any failure they might incur in the representation of characters for which they were unsuited. In the composition of the play itself, the court intrigues occupying the 4th Act are unfamiliar and therefore uninteresting to an Englishman; and the catastrophe of taking the veil wants on the stage to which Protestants are spectators, the awe which probably any reader has felt in the simplest narrative of that dreary close to the sins and sufferings of Madame de la Vallière. In spite of these defects, inherent and incidental, the extraordinary power which Mr. Macready threw into the part of Bragelone preserved the play from positive failure. It was performed nine nights and the manager wished to have continued it for twenty, but the author thought it had already served its purpose in affording him the experience of what to avoid in future. It is possible, however, that by a few alterations, 'La Vallière' might be restored to the stage, with the same theatrical good fortune as has attended the later offspring of the same family; and perhaps at a future period the experiment will be at least adventured." (1)

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, pages 558-559

THE LADY OF LYONS

It is doubtful if Bulwer would have bothered to pursue the drama further if Macready's theatrical management at Covent Garden was not causing that actor great anxiety and worry just at this time. Macready had now the financial side of producing to consider, also, and there seemed to be an alarming dearth of effective plays. The poor manager exclaimed one day in Bulwer's hearing: "Oh, if I could only get a play like 'The Honey-Moon'" a popular comedy of the day. Ever eager to aid his friend, Bulwer wrote a play in ten days and presented it to the actor. Again Macready felt that the feminine lead overshadowed the hero's part, but he decided to risk its production. Bulwer called his play "The Adventure" but at Macready's suggestion the title was changed to "The Lady of Lyons."

On January 3, 1838 Macready wrote to Bulwer:

"My dear Sir -- You have taken from me long since all power to thank you by the accumulated obligations you have laid upon me. I have had a strong motive for wishing you to persevere in your task, and I may truly say it is unmixed with any selfish consideration. It has been my earnest desire to see you triumphantly vindicate your genius from the ungenerous treatment of the press, and I should glory in lending my humble assistance to the accomplishment of such an object. You may therefore rely upon my caution with regard to its production. You shall have my own frank opinion, and I will use the power I possess to obtain for you those which may correct or confirm mine. Rely upon me, that I will not commit you. Nothing could recompense me for the pain it would cost me, should any but the most decisive success follow the experiment. You

have bound me to sincerity, and even were I otherwise disposed, I must, at even a risk be faithful to your injunctions.

"There is only one point of your stipulation to which I object, and I hope in the issue, if not at once, I may over-rule you. You have already so drawn upon my gratitude that I wish you would spare me the clause of non-remuneration. At all events, I beg that may stand over till our case is tried.

"I shall look anxiously to Sunday, and on Wednesday will send you my own opinion with an account of the impression made upon a limited audience by it." (1)

A few days later Macready writes again:

"My dear Sir -- My hopes rise, as my intimacy with Melnotte grows -- I wish I was younger and that my 'chère amie' and myself had put our heads out of the window when it was raining beauty; but, as Falstaff says, 'That's past praying for'.

"Pray do not have any fear as to the managing of the play -- I mean, as to using every means to sustain its course, etc. Believe me, I shall be much more tender of it than if it were my own. My feelings (I hate to add the truth, my interests also) are all enlisted in its cause. I intend to read it to the actors, and distribute the parts on Tuesday next.

"I had thought of the very kind of dress you mention - except that your suggestion of the change of colour to green is an excellent amendment.

"It is necessary to have a name to elude inquisitiveness --we are constantly liable to detection without someone to rest upon. Curiosity is not awakened for an anonymous author, witness the first night of the 'Provost of Bruges'! It is not the first night that decides the attraction of a play -- witness our new opera! I think in all the policy of our proceeding you had better trust to my care and zeal. I will use the means I possess to pique curiosity about it before it appears, but little can be done now in that way. My confidence is in the originality of the play -- its interest, poetry, and passion, added to which it is the first new play produced

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer pages 532-533

under my management, which will add something to the expectation of playgoers. I hope to have it produced either on Thursday, Feb. 1st, or Saturday, Feb. 3rd, but I must work hard for this.

"I cannot wonder at your fatigue -- my astonishment is that you keep your health and mind, under the labours you impose upon yourself." (1)

The references towards the end of this letter are to Bulwer's wish that the play should be produced anonymously. As I have said, his political enemies would not allow him any success on the stage if they could help it, and he was anxious that his second venture should be judged on its own merits. He decided, therefore, to see how it was received by the London public before acknowledging himself as its author. Macready felt that Bulwer-Lytton's name would add prestige to the play and tried to get the author to let him make it known. Bulwer stubbornly refused, however, to acknowledge his authorship until the play had been judged by the public.

"The Lady of Lyons" was produced on Feb. 15, 1838, and was from the first performance an outstanding success. After his first failure, it must have been a great satisfaction to the author to see its continued success, for it was a favorite revival all through his lifetime and for some time after. The parts of Claude Melnotte and

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer pages 533-534

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and Pauline Deschappelles were the ambition of every rising young actor and actress.

After its success, Bulwer wrote the following preface to the play. In the last paragraph it is interesting to see that he alludes directly to the attacks of his political enemies, upon whom he always felt rested the responsibility for the failure of "The Duchess de la Vallière":

". . . The play itself was composed with a two-fold object. In the first place, sympathizing with the enterprise of Mr. Macready, as Manager of Covent Garden, and believing that many of the higher interests of the Drama were involved in the success or failure of an enterprise equally hazardous and disinterested, I felt, if I may so presume to express myself, something of the Brotherhood of Art; and it was only for Mr. Macready to think it possible that I might serve him in order to induce me to make the attempt.

"Secondly, in that attempt I was mainly anxious to see whether or not, after the comparative failure on the stage of "The Duchess de la Vallière", certain critics had truly declared that it was not in my power to attain the art of dramatic construction and theatrical effect. I felt, indeed, that it was in this that a writer, accustomed to the narrative class of composition, would have the most both to learn and unlearn. Accordingly, it was to the development of the plot and the arrangement of the incidents that I directed my chief attention; -- and I sought to throw whatever belongs to poetry less into the diction and the "felicity of words" than into the construction of the story, the creation of the characters, and the spirit of the pervading sentiment.

"The authorship of the play was neither avowed nor suspected until the play had established itself in public favour. The announcement of my name was the signal for attacks, chiefly political, to which it is now needless to refer. When a work has outlived for some time the earlier hostilities of criticism, there comes a new race of critics to which a writer may, for the most part,

calmly trust for a fair consideration, whether of the faults or the merits of his performance." (1)

A humorous little anecdote is connected with the first performance of "The Lady of Lyons." Most of Bulwer's biographers relate the incident, and as some of these biographies were published during his own life time, it must be substantially true.

"The night when 'The Lady of Lyons' was first produced, Bulwer was detained in the House of Commons, where he made a speech in support of Mr. Grote's Bill for the Establishment of the Ballot at elections. At the conclusion of his speech he left the House and hurried to Covent Garden to learn the result of the performance. On the way he met Sergeant Talfourd, a fellow member and fellow author, whose play 'Ion' had been produced in 1836. Talfourd was himself returning from Covent Garden, and was eagerly questioned about the new play by Bulwer, whom he little suspected of being its author. 'Oh, it went very well indeed -- for that sort of thing,' was the reply. Bulwer arrived at the theatre just in time to see the last act, at the conclusion of which the curtain fell amidst the enthusiastic applause of the audience. To the loud cries of 'Author' no reply was forthcoming. Everyone began discussing the play and its unknown author. 'What do you think of it?' said Lady Blessington to Bulwer. 'Oh, very good -- for that sort of thing,' he replied. Lady Blessington was shocked and said, 'That is the first time I have seen you jealous.' A few days later, when the authorship was announced, she wrote him the following letter (2)

Lady Blessington to Edward Bulwer

"MY DEAREST FRIEND -- I confess, that I have rarely in my life enjoyed so great a pleasure as on finding that a play, which excited my feelings and delighted my imagination more than any other I had ever beheld, was from your pen. My proudest anticipations are fulfilled for the success of 'The Lady of Lyons' leaves all competition behind, and this, too, without the prestige of its authorship being known. When I read the extracts in the

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(1) Bulwer-Lytton: Preface to "The Lady of Lyons"
(2) Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, pages 535-36

'Examiner' last Sunday, I said that I thought there was only one man in England or in the world, who could have written them. The thoughts, the language, struck me as being yours and yours only, but yet on reflection, I thought that you would have entrusted me with the secret, and knowing also your numerous other avocations, I fancied it was impossible that you could have found time to have written this exquisite play.

"Now shall I confess a weakness to you? I felt the charm of the high-souled and beautiful sentiments, and the eloquent words in which they are dressed, so strongly, that I was jealous for your fame, and pained that another could so write. When I heard everyone I met proclaiming 'The Lady of Lyons' to be perfection, nay some adding: -- 'Oh, if your friend Bulwer wrote a piece like this, he might be as unrivalled in his theatrical as in his novelist reputation,' -- I have felt envious of the author of this piece, which has won all praise, and wished that so dangerous a rival to you had not sprung forth. And yet I never can give up my honest and heart-felt admiration for La Vallière, which, had it been brought out without your name, which served as the watchword for political animosity to take the field against it, and had it been properly cast, must have obtained a most brilliant success, for it richly merited it. The political attacks against 'The Lady of Lyons' can do it no harm; everyone feels the motives. Heaven bless you, and preserve to your country a genius that enobles it, prays Your affectionate and proud friend,

M. BLESSINGTON." (1)

Edward Bulwer to Lady Blessington.

"MY DEAREST FRIEND -- The moment you liked 'The Lady of Lyons' I was satisfied. The wish to prove that your and Alfred's kind belief that I could hit off the dramatic knack, impelled me to the attempt, as much as anything else. But I should not like you to have known the pain of a second failure on my part, and therefore was silent till I thought you would be pleased -- not pained.

E.L.B." (2)

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, pages 536-37
(2) Ibid., page 538

The following appreciative letter was also received from Mrs. Shelley, the poet's widow: --

"Dear Mr. Bulwer -- Do excuse my writing a few lines to say how very much 'The Lady of Lyons' pleased me. The interest is well-maintained, the dialogue, natural, one person answers the other, not as I found in 'Werner' and 'Sardanapalus', each person made a little speech apart, or one only speaking that the other might say something; the incidents flow from the dialogue, and that without soliloquies, and the incidents themselves flow naturally one from another. There is the charm of nature and high feeling thrown over all.

"I think that in this play you have done as Shelley used to exhort Lord Byron to do -- left the beaten road of old romance so worn by modern dramatists, and idealized the present; and my belief is that now that you have found the secret of dramatic interest, and to please the public, you will, while you adhere to the rules that enable you to accomplish this necessary part of a drama, raise the audience to what height you please. I am delighted with the promise you hold out of being a great dramatic writer. But (if I may venture to express an opinion springing from something you said the other night) do not be apt to fancy that you are less great when you are more facile. It is not always the most studied and (consequently) the favourite works of an author that are his best titles to fame -- the soil ought to be carefully tended, but the flower that springs into bloom most swiftly is the loveliest.

"I have not read your play. I would not till I saw it, for a play is a thing for acting, not the closet." (1)

The financial dealings between Bulwer and Macready are interesting, especially as they show how little Bulwer wrote his plays for money. When "The Duchess de la Vallière" was produced, Macready was not the manager of Covent Garden but merely the star of the theatrical company retained there.

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, page 538

Naturally, Bulwer had tried at that time to secure the most favorable terms that he could, first from Mr. Bunn, manager of Drury Lane, and afterwards from Mr. Osbaldiston, of Covent Garden, by whom the play was produced. "The Lady of Lyons", however, was written specially for Macready who was now manager of Covent Garden. Bulwer looked upon this play as an offering of friendship to the actor whom he admired so much rather than as a financial proposition.

A month after the first night of "The Lady of Lyons" Macready wrote as follows: --

"My dear Sir -- When you first proposed to lend the powerful assistance of your name and talent to my attempt, I reserved the subject of pecuniary compensation for a later consideration. Let me hope that the first class in my scale of payment to authors, though far below what I would wish to offer you, may not meet with objection from you. By this scale in a run of forty nights an author would recieve the sum of six hundred pounds, and I have the pleasure of enclosing you a cheque for the amount with which I have credited you upon our first fourteen. I will not here repeat expressions of obligation, with which I must almost have wearied you, but merely assure you that I am and always must remain, my dear Sir -- Sincerely and most gratefully yours, W.C.Macready." (1)

Bulwer refused to accept this remuneration, and to his letter returning the cheque, Macready sent the following grateful reply: --

"My dear Bulwer -- The favour you conferred upon me in your dedication of 'La Vallière' impressed me with a sense of obligation that will continue with life. In associating

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, pages 540-41

my name with your own you graced me with a lasting honour, and rendered me an important service. I was already sufficiently indebted to you to be conscious of my own inability ever to requite your kindness. What then am I now to say to you? or how can I attempt to thank you for your letter of yesterday? After what I have already known of you, it would be an injustice to say it surprised me. I was quite overcome by it, and whatever may be the issue of the struggle I am engaged in, this one occurrence will prevent me from regretting the attempt I have made.

"I accept this act of friendship from you, I hope, in its own spirit. I cannot dwell upon it; it is an event in my life, of which, I believe, my children will be proud.

"Pray translate what you think should be my feelings into your own language, and let me, with the full credit of always retaining them, subscribe myself -- Your grateful and devoted friend, W.C.Macready." (1)

As the amount of prose in "The Lady of Lyons" exceeds the poetry, I am not including it in my discussion, but merely mention it as a successful step toward the greatest dramatic work in Bulwer's career -- "Richelieu."

RICHELIEU

After the successful production of "The Lady of Lyons" Bulwer informed Macready that he had no intention of writing any more for the stage. However, he told him, too, that he would at any time be willing to come to his friend's assistance if he ever needed his help. Macready took him literally, it seems, and asked him very soon to fulfil his offer of assistance and give him another play. Macready in his diary says:

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, pages 540-41

"July 25. Sir E. Bulwer came into my room and I talked with him about a play for next season. He wants a subject and will go to work.

"Sept. 17. Letters from Bulwer about subject.
"Sept. 24. Bulwer came and talked about a subject of which he is thinking." (1)

On October 3 Bulwer writes to Forster:-

"The play stands dead still. Not a subject to be found, though I have read for it like a tiger. Just finished Goethe's novel of affinities. Do read it; it is wonderful. What a giant beside all other fictionists, Cervantes alone excepted and hardly he. Such effects with such ease, such perfectly pure art. The interior meaning (without which no romance, no novel is worth much) so delicate, so noble; and yet the crowd of readers would call it the most ridiculous nonsense! I mean, of course, English readers. Our countrymen only understand the broad splosh, the thick brush, lots of outline, and a burly chap in the foreground. If I were not in politics I would learn another language, in order to be understood." (2)

Once the subject of the play was decided upon, it must have been written in the shortest time possible for on October 24, Macready writes:

"Letter from Bulwer informing me that he had made out a rough sketch of a play, an historical comedy, on the subject of Richelieu. I answered him, delighted with the news." (3)

On November 4 Bulwer writes to Forster from Knebworth:

"This morning I put the last stroke to 'Richelieu'."

When it is remembered that "The Lady of Lyons" and "Richelieu" are both five-act plays, the first partly and the second entirely in blank verse, it is surprising to know that "The Lady of Lyons" was written in a fortnight

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(1) Macready, W.C.: Reminiscences, edited by Sir Frederick Pollock
(2) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, page 542
(3) Macready, W.C.: Reminiscences; edited by Sir Frederick Pollock

and "Richelieu" in about the same time. The conditions described in the letters just quoted were hardly favorable for dramatic composition and gives us some idea of the facility and rapidity with which Bulwer worked. The first draft of the new play, however, was subjected to constant revision and in this work he received most valuable assistance from the actor for whom it was written. Macready's diary says:

"November 17. -- Called on Bulwer and talked over the play of 'Richelieu'. He combated my objections and acceded to them as his judgment swayed him; but when I developed the object of the whole plan of alterations he was in ecstasies. I never saw him so excited, several times exclaiming that he was 'enchanted' with the plan, and observed in high spirits 'What a fellow you are!' I left him the play and he promised to let me have it in a week! He is a wonderful man." (1)

On the very next day Bulwer brought back two scenes which he had rewritten, and by November 21, three days later, the whole was completed. At the end of a letter to Macready enclosing some alterations, Bulwer writes:

"Fortunately, I had done my corrections today before the news of poor L.E.L.'s death, which I have just seen in the paper. It has quite overcome me, and I cannot write now the many little things that occur to me. So young, so gifted, and I found a letter from her yesterday in high spirits. I have not been so shocked for years."(2)

On November the twenty-fourth the play was read to a few friends. Robert Browning was among those present and was first to pronounce the verdict that "Richelieu" was "a

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(1) Macready, W.C.: Reminiscences, edited by Sir Frederick Pollock, page 463

(2) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, page 543

great play." An amusing incident occurred which might have had unfortunate consequences. During the reading of the third act Forster fell asleep, which considerably offended the sensitive author. Fortunately, the interchange of the following letters completely removed all unpleasantness between the two great friends:

"My dear Bulwer -- I have to apologize most deeply for what occurred on Sunday night. Is it necessary for me to say that any act of apparent rudeness from me to you was most unintentional and has ever since its occurrence been deeply regretted. I will not trust myself to describe indeed the pain I have suffered since.

"I offer no extenuation of this unfortunate matter -- most unfortunate for me. I merely ask you to forgive it and to forgive me, and with this confidence I ask it, that during the many years I have known and admired your writings and have been honoured by your friendship, this is the first occasion in which I have seemed indifferent to what interested you. God knows with how little truth I seemed so then, or with how much sincere sorrow I write this note to you. -- Believe me, Yours most faithfully, John Forster."(1)

"My dear Forster -- I am very much obliged by your kind and friendly letter. I do not deny that I felt pain. But it was rather that of a friendly feeling hurt than a vain one wounded. Your letter has done more than remove the impression, it has substituted another of unalloyed pleasure and satisfaction. Pray think no more of it unless as a new lease of esteem and regard between yourself and, my dear Forster, -- Yours very truly, E.L.Bulwer." (2)

"Richelieu" was produced at Covent Garden on March 7, 1839 and was eminently successful. Macready himself was not as satisfied as the public, for he writes in his diary:

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, page 544

(2) Ibid

"March 7th. -- Lay in bed thinking over my part of Richelieu until time to rise. Went to Covent Garden Theatre. Rehearsed the play. . . Acted Cardinal Richelieu very nervously; lost my self-possession, and was obliged to use too much effort; it did not satisfy me at all, there were no artist-like touches through the play. How can a person get up such a play and do justice at the same time to such a character? It is not possible. Was called for and very enthusiastically received; gave out the play for every night. The success of the play seemed to be unequivocal. What will the papers say?" (1)

The frequent performance of "Richelieu" both in England and American leaves no doubt as to its immediate and continuous success. The following London showings prove that there was a constant demand for the play both by the theater-going public and by actors wishing to present their audiences popular revivals.

Covent Garden	Macready as Richelieu; Helen Faucit as Julie	March 7, 1839
Sadler's Wells	Samuel Phelps as Richelieu; June 18, 1845 Mrs. Warner as Julie	
Princess's	Macready as Richelieu; Emmeline Montague as Julie	March 22, 1848
Surrey	William Creswick;	October 8, 1849
Olympic	Henry Farren as Richelieu; June 15, 1852	
Lyceum	Charles Dillon as Richelieu; April 2, 1857	
Princess's	Samuel Phelps as Richelieu; June 7, 1860 Rose Leclercq as Julie	
Haymarket	Edwin Booth as Richelieu; October 31, 1861	

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(1) Macready, W.C.: Reminiscences; edited by Sir Frederick Pollock

Drury Lane	T. C. King as Richelieu; March 15, 1869
Lyceum	Henry Irving as Richelieu; September 27, 1873 Isabel Bateman as Julia (114 performances at this appearance)
	Henry Irving as Richelieu; June 13, 1879 Alma Murray as Julie
Adelphi	Hermann Vezin as Richelieu; July 2, 1879 Mrs. Bernard Beere as Julie
Princess's	Edwin Booth as Richelieu; November 20, 1880 Florence Gerard as Julie
Adelphi	Edwin Booth as Richelieu; June 26, 1882 Bella Bateman as Julie
Lyceum	Lawrence Barrett as Richelieu; April 28, 1884 Marie Wainwright as Julie
	Henry Irving as Richelieu; August 28, 1884 Winifred Emery as Julie
	Henry Irving as Richelieu; May 7, 1892 Jessie Millward as Julie
Strand	Robert Hilton as Richelieu; February 10, 1910

MODERN AMERICAN SUCCESSES

Robert Mantell as Richelieu
Walter Hampden as Richelieu (1)

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(1) Data compiled from John Parker's "Who's Who in the Theater"

As Bulwer first sketched the play, De Mauprat was the hero. However, Macready saw greater possibilities in the figure of the Cardinal and therefore Bulwer, always eager to honor Macready's suggestions, elaborated Richelieu into the most important character in the play, making everyone else subordinate to him. This seems to have been a happy suggestion as the great Cardinal became at once a popular favorite and has remained one of the stage's great personages.

"Richelieu" is an excellent play. I first saw the character of the Cardinal portrayed by Robert Mantell when a student at college, and it has always remained one of my most vivid and most colorful memories. Last winter I saw Walter Hampden play the role, and again the virility and genuineness of the characterization delighted me.

A play that can please and move succeeding generations as much as this obviously does, surely has the breath of life in it. The Cardinal is a truly heroic figure, powerfully conceived and admirably portrayed -- a puissant personality combining patriot, statesman, and priest. Adamant and cruel can he be toward his country's foes, but tender as a woman toward the orphan child whose soldier father died for France. The many facets of his personality are clearly cut, and they stand out as consequences of the experiences to which the man himself is subjected. The

changing circumstances of the play show now one facet and now another. But powerful as the characterization is, we see that it moves through a gripping and complex plot. Bulwer created tense conflicts, great situations, realistic incidents. Although a heroic play with a happy ending, the play satisfies all the requirements laid down in Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy. We pity the great statesman stripped of honor, dignity, and power, yet daring to oppose the anger of an absolute monarch and the malice of his triumphant enemies rather than fail in the fulfillment of his duty toward the innocent and defenseless Julie. We shudder in terror lest a terrible decision ever be ours such as Julie and her lover had to face -- death or dishonor! Terror awaits each turn of fortune's wheel; and the agony of the rack, the blackness of the Bastille, the headsman's bloody axe loom up all through the play as fearful shadows falling along the path of the young soldier of fortune, De Mauprat. His courage, his bravery, and knightly honour endear him to us even while we recognize the power of his recklessness, his rash haste, his over-trustfulness and unwary credulity to accomplish well-nigh his ruin. Here is a nature eminently noble yet with the dram of eale so insisted upon by Aristotle for tragedy, and most of De Mauprat's life falls under this shadow.

We have in this play, too, a striking illustration of the dramatic effect of "Peripetia." It is always doubly effective when the fall of the hero automatically accomplishes the rise to power of his enemies and vice versa. Shakespeare does this in his "Merchant of Venice" when Antonio's financial losses and bankruptcy place the triumphant Shylock in a position to demand the pound of flesh, and Antonio's vindication places Shylock, fortune confiscated, life forfeited, at the mercy of the Venetian court. So Bulwer shows us "Richelieu", full of wisdom and resource, outwitting his enemies, foiling conspiracies, master of life and death, shrunk over night into a powerless dying old man until:

> "The lackey of the anteroom is not
> More powerless than the Minister of France."

Another turn of the wheel and his power is restored, his hand again at the helm, and his enemies at his feet. The dying spirit springs into new life as once more he dictates the plans that will deliver his beloved France from her enemies. How well he understands himself, and the source of the strength and power that re-animates his spare, frail body. For France his brain schemes, his heart beats, his soul sees the vision. When the King, who cannot comprehend this marvelous physical transformation, half-ironically

exclaims: "One moment makes a startling cure, Lord Cardinal." Richelieu's reply embodies the literal truth -- the love of France, the success of his hopes for her, invigorates him, sustains him, revitalizes him, calls him back from the brink of the grave.

Even the minor characters in "Richelieu" are drawn with skill and individuality: Marion, the scarlet woman, faithful to the one noble emotion in her life -- her trust in Richelieu, as the saviour of France; the boy, Francois, failing in his first mission, braving discovery, death, torture to vindicate the great man's trust in him; "Bishop" Joseph, who calls out many of the sly humorous touches of the play, and whose role as confidant gives us a chance to enter into the mind of Richelieu; Beringhen, whose "scented soul" De Mauprat longs to send "with one glad thrust to hell"; Orleans, a man whose ambitions and armours run side by side; Baradas, the elemental villain, fitting squire to the archfiend Iago -- these are characters that give reality and a flesh and blood semblance to the drama.

The play opens at the house of Marion de Lorme, the mistress of the Prince of Orleans, but secretly in the pay of the Cardinal. We are immediately admitted into the knowledge of a conspiracy, headed by the royal Orleans and directed by the unscrupulous Count Baradas, which seeks

to depose the King and assassinate Richelieu, the Minister of State. All that is lacking is a man desperate enough to attempt the life of the great Cardinal, and a courier trustworthy enough to carry the names and plans of the conspirators to Bouillon, who is waiting with his army for the signal to march on Paris. Count Baradas seeks to find the assassin in young De Mauprat, a handsome, reckless young officer, "the wildest, gayest gallant, and bravest knight in France," who has excited his envy and jealousy.

De Mauprat, who had been condemned to death by the Cardinal for joining one of Orleans's revolts in the past, had received the opportunity from Richelieu of seeking a soldier's grave instead of the traitor's block. He had gone to the Spanish wars but, though he had courted death until all France echoed with the tales of his mad daring, he had returned unscathed to face again his suspended sentence.

DE MAUPRAT. You have heard if I fought bravely. Death became
Desired as Daphne by the eager Daygod,
Like him I chased the nymph -- to grasp the laurel!
I could not die! (1)

However, De Mauprat refuses to join the conspiracy: "Better the victim than the assassin!" Believing the

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act I, Scene 1

hypocritical Count his friend, the soldier rashly discloses to him his hopeless love for Julie, the Cardinal's beautiful ward with whom Baradas is also in love. Baradas knows of the King's infatuation for Julie and is willing, by marrying her, to act as a cloak for the King's designs, planning all the while, when the King is deposed, to enjoy her himself.

Baradas, failing to obtain an assassin, is glad to see Mauprat arrested by the Cardinal's guard. The scene ends with a disclosure of Baradas's duel aims, the attainment of which form the complication of the plot:

". . . . . By the king's aid
I will be Julie's husband -- in despite
Of my Lord Cardinal! -- by the king's aid
I will be minister of France -- in spite
Of my Lord Cardinal! -- And then -- what then?
The king loves Julie -- feeble prince -- false master --
Then, by the aid of Bouillon, and the Spaniard,
I will dethrone the king; and all -- ha! -- ha! --
All, in despite of my Lord Cardinal!" (1)

After this admirable introduction, we get our first glimpse of the old Cardinal, so hated and feared by his enemies. As he discusses affairs of state with Joseph, he shows himself a shrewd, sagacious statesman; every now and again the sternness of his nature is softened and mellowed by a grim irony; one thought of Julie softens him into a loving, kind, indulgent father. When Joseph

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act I, Scene 1

informs him that Louis desires Julie, and would marry her to Barabas for "decorum", he resolves that such a dishonor will never be. Julie unwittingly discloses to him her love for Mauprat and the Cardinal immediately divines a way to circumvent the King, make Julie happy, and win to himself a valiant sword. One of the finest touches in the play is the Cardinal's admiration for the Chevalier's courage, bravery, and honor while condemning his impetuosity and reckless living.

"Rise, my children,
For ye are mine -- mine both; -- and in your sweet
And young delight -- your love (life's first-born glory) --
My own lost youth breathes musical!" (1)

However, the joy of the young pair is short-lived for, upon entering their new home, the gift of Richelieu, De Mauprat is greeted with a letter from the King, telling him that his marriage is annulled by royal command. The false Baradas easily succeeds in making the credulous Mauprat believe that Richelieu is honored by Louis's regard for his ward, and would use him as a pawn.

BARADAS. . . . Julie is his ward,
Innocent -- docile -- pliant to his will --
He placed her at the court -- foresaw the rest --
The king loves Julie!
DE MAUPRAT. Merciful Heaven! The king!
BARADAS. Such Cupids lend new plumes to Richelieu's wings;
But court etiquette must give such Cupids

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act II, Scene 1

"The veil of Hymen -- (Hymen but in name.)
He look'd abroad -- found you his foe: Thus served
Ambition -- by the grandeur of his ward,
And vengeance -- by dishonour to his foe!

DE MAUPRAT. Prove this.

BARADAS. You have the proof -- the royal
Letter: --
Your strange exemption from the general pardon,
Known but to me and Richelieu; can you doubt
Your friend to acquit your foe? The truth is glaring --
Richelieu alone could tell the princely lover
The tale which sells your life, -- or buys your honour!

DE MAUPRAT. I see it all! Mock pardon --
hurried nuptials --
False bounty! -- all! -- the serpent of that smile!
Oh! it stings home!" (1)

Julie is summoned by royal command to the palace which confirms Baradas's insinuations; and De Mauprat, near crazed with grief and passion, agrees to kill Richelieu, and promises to attend the rendez-vous at Marion's at midnight.

Meanwhile Marion brings word of the conspiracy to the Cardinal, and he provides a courier in the person of Francois, whom Marion is to introduce to Orleans as her brother. Midnight holds one of the tensest situations in the play. Richelieu, thoroughly alarmed at last, waits for the paper which will bring his enemies into his power. His life has been spent for France and with what reward? His king ungrateful, his countrymen plotting his life, his days devoid of happiness, his nights of rest. Breathlessly Francois enters and confesses failure:

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act II, Scene 1

FRANCOIS. . . . . Hastening from the house,
My footstep in the stirrup, Marion stole
Across the threshold, whispering 'Lose no moment
Ere Richelieu have the packet: tell him too --
Murder is in the winds of Night, and Orleans
Swears, ere the dawn, the Cardinal shall be clay.'
She said, and trembling fled within; when, lo!
A hand of iron griped me; through the dark
Gleam'd the dim shadow of an arm'd man:
Ere I could draw -- the prize was wrested from me,
And a hoarse voice gasp'd -- 'Spy, I spare thee, for
This steel is virgin to thy Lord!' with that
He vanish'd. -- Scared and trembling for thy safety
I mounted, fled, and, kneeling at thy feet,
Implore thee to acquit my faith -- but not,
Like him, to spare my life.
RICHELIEU. Who spake of life?
I bade thee grasp that treasure as thine honour --
A jewel worth whole hecatombs of lives!
Begone! -- redeem thine honour -- back to Marion --
Or Baradas -- or Orleans -- track the robber --
Regain the packet -- or crawl on to Age --
Age and grey hairs like mine -- and know, thou hast lost
That which had made thee great and saved thy country, --
See me not till thou'st bought the right to seek me. --
Away! -- Nay, cheer thee, thou hast not fail'd yet, --
There's no such word as 'fail!' " (1)

Julie seeks the protection of the Cardinal. The King had summoned her to the palace to force his unwelcome love upon her, and from Baradas she has heard that her husband knew of Louis's love and thought it an honor. Crushed and desolate, she throws herself upon the only strength she knows or trusts. Richelieu is a better judge of men and thinks De Mauprat innocent of such baseness. Richelieu leads her to her room and returns to find De Mauprat, dagger in hand, impatient for revenge. The physical courage of Richelieu is superb; he dares the chevalier

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act III, Scene 1

to murder his country which lives through him. Then quickly calling Julie, the Cardinal proves to De Mauprat that his accusations are false and that he has been the dupe of Baradas's treachery. The lies and dastardly schemes of the conspirators are finally laid bare to all three. But De Mauprat is only one of the many that now swarm through the castle waiting for news of Richelieu's death:

JULIE. A hoarse, gathering murmur! --
Hurrying and heavy footsteps!
RICHELIEU. Ha! -- the posterns?
DE MAUPRAT. No egress where no sentry!
RICHELIEU. Follow me --
I have it! -- to my chamber -- quick! Come, Julie!
Hush! Mauprat, come!
[Murmur at a distance. -- Death to the Cardinal!]
RICHELIEU. Bloodhounds, I laugh at ye! -- ha'. ha! -- we will
Baffle them yet. -- Ha! -- ha!
[Exeunt Julie, Mauprat, Richelieu.]
HUGUET. [without] This way -- this way!" (1)

The trusty Huguet, captain of the Cardinal's guard, is a traitor and to him De Mauprat has given the fateful dispatch to Bouillon. Louis cannot be convinced without it; this the Cardinal knows full well. The situation calls for, not the courage of the lion, but the wariness of the fox; but Richelieu is equal to the situation and foils his enemies with his nimble wits. Quickly Richelieu feigns death; Mauprat discloses the body to the view of

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act III, Scene 2

the would-be assassins:

DE MAUPRAT. Live the King!
Richelieu is dead!
HUGUET. [advancing towards the recess; Mauprat following his hand on his dagger.]
Are his eyes open?
DE MAUPRAT. Ay,
As if in life!
HUGUET. [turning back] I will not look on him.
You have been long.
DE MAUPRAT. I watch'd him till he slept.
Heed me. No trace of blood reveals the deed;
Strangled in sleep. His health hath long been broken --
Found breathless in his bed. So runs our tale,
Remember! Back to Paris -- Orleans gives
Ten thousand crowns, and Baradas a lordship,
To him who first gluts vengeance with the news
That Richelieu is in heaven! Quick, that all France
May share your joy."(1)

Immediately they rush off to carry the good news to Baradas and gain their promised rewards. Once more Richelieu is triumphant over treachery!

Act III, Scene IV, discloses the arch-conspirators waiting impatiently for the news which Huguet finally brings. Instead of reward, Baradas consigns him to the Bastille:

HUGUET. No, thou durst not!
BARADAS. Seize on the ruffian -- bind him --
gag him! Off
To the Bastille!
HUGUET. Your word -- your plighted faith!
BARADAS. Insolent liar! ho, away!
HUGUET. Nay Count;
I have that about me, which --
BARADAS. Away with him!
[Exeunt Huguet and Archers.]
Now, then, all's safe; Huguet must die in prison. (2)

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act III, Scene 3
(2) Ibid. Act III, Scene 4

The conspirators seek the King to curry favor until the packet is found and sent to Bouillon, and the army moves on Paris. De Mauprat, seeking vengeance, presses a duel upon Baradas. When the King appears upon the scene, Baradas informs him that the chevalier is his enemy, Julie's husband, and asks for his consignment to the Bastille, a favor the King is only too willing to grant. To the consternation of everyone Richelieu appears on the scene. But it is too late; the King is already under the sinister domination of Baradas. De Mauprat calls upon the Cardinal to save him from the Bastille; but Louis, refusing Richelieu's plea, confirms the sentence.

Louis seeks now to possess the defenseless Julie, bereft as she is of husband and guardian. Bewildered she cries:

JULIE. O, mercy! mercy!
Save him, restore him, father! Art thou not
The Cardinal-King? -- the Lord of life and death --
Beneath whose light, as deeps beneath the moon,
The solemn tides of Empire ebb and flow?
Art thou not Richelieu?
RICHELIEU. Yesterday I was! --
Today, a very weak old man! Tomorrow,
I know not what!
JULIE. Do you conceive his meaning?
Alas! I cannot. But, methinks, my senses
Are duller than they were! (1)

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act IV, Scene 2

Richelieu, shorn of his political power though he may be, has still a power left to him which he now launches against his tormentors. When the King commands the presence of Julie, Richelieu rises in all his dignity of priest and defies Baradas to move a finger against the person of the girl:

BARADAS. My Lord, the King cannot believe your Eminence
So far forgets your duty, and his greatness,
As to resist his mandate! Pray you, Madam,
Obey the King -- no cause for fear!
JULIE. My father!
RICHELIEU. She shall not stir!
BARADAS. You are not of her kindred --
An orphan --
RICHELIEU. And her country is her mother!
BARADAS. The country is the King!
RICHELIEU. Ay, is it so? --
Then wakes the power which in the age of iron
Burst forth to curb the great, and raise the low.
Mark, where she stands! around her form I draw
The awful circle of our solemn church!
Set but a foot within that holy ground,
And on thy head -- yea, though it wore a crown --
I launch the curse of Rome! (1)

Baradas tries other tactics. He has De Mauprat brought from the Bastille in the hope that the sight of him, the realization of his doom, may lead Julie to purchase his freedom with her honor. But Julie prefers death to such infamy. As Baradas condemns De Mauprat to the rack and the block, Richelieu appears, weak and weary unto death, to surrender his office of Minister of State. The

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act IV, Scene 2

work of his life in ruins, his country tottering, he cannot endure life. Louis immediately confers the post upon Baradas. Fortunately, Francois arrives with the tell-tale packet which proves the guilt of Baradas and Orleans; and Louis, overcome with terror, turns to Richelieu, now sunk almost into lifelessness, reinstating him with absolute power as Minister of State. His lost power restored, the destiny and safety of France once more in his grasp, his enemies swept from his path, his King humbled and chastened, Richelieu's strength comes flooding back, and his tall gaunt figure towers with renewed energy and strength. He tears up De Mauprat's death warrant. As firmly as ever, but with his old grim humor restored, he tells Louis that Julie is not for him:

RICHELIEU. See here De Mauprat's death-writ, Julie'.
Parchment for battledores! -- Embrace your husband! --
At last the old man blesses you!
JULIE. O joy!
You are saved; you live -- I hold you in these arms.
MAUPRAT. Never to part --
JULIE. No never, Adrien -- never!
LOUIS. [peevishly] One moment makes a startling cure, Lord Cardinal.
RICHELIEU. Ay, Sire, for in one moment there did pass
Into this wither'd frame the might of France! --
My own dear France -- I have thee yet -- I have saved thee!
I clasp thee still! -- it was thy voice that call'd me
Back from the tomb! -- What mistress like our country?
LOUIS. For Mauprat's pardon -- well! But Julie, -- Richelieu
Leave me one thing to love! --

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu

RICHELIEU. A subject's luxury!
Yet, if you must love something, Sire -- love me!
LOUIS [smiling in spite of himself.] Fair proxy for a young fresh Demoiselle!
RICHELIEU. Your heart speaks for my clients: Kneel my children,
And thank your King, --
JULIE. Ah, tears like these my liege,
Are dews that mount to Heaven.
LOUIS. Rise -- rise -- be happy. (1)

Tennyson would have done well to learn a lesson from Bulwer's handling of a historical play. The destiny of the mightiest nation in Europe is at stake; internal treachery, civil war, base malice are striking at the foundation of Church and State; a foreign enemy, Spain, lies waiting for a moment of weakness to seize upon the prey; but is it through all this that we watch the great Richelieu move? No -- it is not the statesman's brain nor the patriot's zeal but the loving heart of an old man who cherishes the orphan child committed to his care, and resolves to save her honor though he defy the King and jeopardize life and position. Bulwer realized, as Tennyson failed to do, that it is in the human relationships such as that of the old Cardinal's protection of the young and innocent girl, Julie, that strong emotional appeals lie. How the Cardinal loved youth: the innocence of Julie, the idealism of Francois, the bravery and dash of De Mauprat, even the devotion of the courtesan Marion! All that was

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act V, Scene 3

fine in others seemed to find a responsive chord in his appreciative understanding heart, which could still be so cruel, so desperately cruel to the enemies of France. To me, Bulwer's picture of Richelieu guarding the innocence of Julie from the desires of the King was infinitely more in keeping with his priestly and heroic character than Tennyson's Becket guarding the paramour of a King, possessed already of a queen who had borne him four children. The love interest in "Richelieu" is one of its most poignant charms.

It is intensely interesting, for the purpose of comparison, to have had Bulwer record in an essay what he thought of the historical character of Richelieu, the actual flesh and blood man upon whom he founded the dramatic figure that bears the great Cardinal's name. His knowledge of the man and his times was the result of study and research. He says:

"Compare the one man with the multiform people. Compare Richelieu with the Republic. How much wiser in his generation is the one man! Richelieu with his errors, his crimes, his foibles, and his cruelties, marches invariably to one result and obtains it. He overthrows but to construct. He destroys but to establish. He desired to create a great monarchy, and he succeeded. The people, with crimes to which those of the one man seem fair and spotless, with absurdities which turn the tragedy of massacre into farce, with energies to which all individual strength is as a leaf upon the whirlpool, sets up a democracy as the bridge to a despotism. The people vanish as the trick of a pantomime, and the soldier with the iron crown of the Lombard, fills, solitary and sublime, the void space where the loud democracy roared and swayed.

And this because in the individual there is continuity of purpose. The one is a man -- the many a child.

"Take the time of Richelieu, and we see the monk, the spy, the headsman, the dungeon, opening at one door on the scaffold, on the other to the king's closet. The Minister is the State -- where the People? It has no existence in itself save at riotous fits and starts -- it has a representative, capricious, frivolous, brave, cruel, but not without a justice in its cruelty, and that representative is the State -- in other words, Armand Richelieu. Like all men who rise to supreme power, the great cardinal had the characteristics of the time and the nation that he ruled. In his faults or his merits he was eminently French. He represented the want of the French People at that precise period in their history. He reduced provinces into a Nation. He forced discordant elements, whether plebeian or patrician, into order. He did not make the people free, nor were they fit for it. But out of riotous and barbarous factions, he called forth orderly subjects and a rough undeveloped system of civil government. He never once appeared as the Enemy to the multitude. His cruelty was directed to their enemies.

"In all those contests for power in which we see the worn, anxious, solemn image of the Cardinal Minister, with his terrible familiars of spy and hangman, he is still on that side where the French Nation should have ranged, building up the school beside the throne, and making at least a state, tho' the time and the men had not yet arrived for the creation of a People.

"In the age of Louis XIV., whatever was best and highest in the national spirit, is to be found, not in the city or the court, but in the old provincial chivalry in whom something of the ideal qualities of the Norman or the French yet survived. It is a mistake into which the mighty but irregular genius of a Victor Hugo and his inferior disciples have strangely fallen, to suppose that it is by a peasant or plebeian that the People are alone represented. When the poet of 'Ruy Blas' actually places a philosophising valet on the stage as the representative of the brave, haughty and priest-ridden people of Spain, it is impossible not to feel that art and nature are alike debased. A people is not a class but a nation. The national spirit and the popular spirit are one and the same. In a prince, a noble, or a priest, we may often find the ideal of a generation more marked and illustrated than

in a bricklayer or a carpenter, and sometimes indeed vice versa." (1)

"Richelieu" is, to be sure, not a heroic tragedy but essentially a hero-play. It is interesting to note the fascination that a hero-play holds for the average audience, from the days of Marlowe up to the present time. There is something about a master mind, whether devil or saint, that fills us with wonder and awe. Nietzsche's philosophy is interesting just because he exalts the superman above the crowd. George Bernard Shaw plainly shows the influence of Nietzsche in his "Man and Superman." Many of our modern underworld movie thrillers are but another phase of the age-old attempt to represent the master mind, in this case perverted but still dominating. Even the diabolical mind, all surpassing, all conquering, creating its own moral standards because it is so infinitely above the narrow code of petty men, wins a thrill of admiration. We love to see portrayed the superman, the dominating intelligence, the outstandingly heroic. It carries us back to Homer and the Greek tragedies. What is it Virgil says: "Arma virumque cano;" and the world is always ready to listen enthralled, round-eyed, to such a tale. The names of Alexander, Caesar, King Arthur, Henry V, Richelieu will

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(1) The Earl of Lytton: The Life of Edward Bulwer, pages 555-56

always thrill us because they recall for us men who stood head and shoulders above the crowd. It is the superman, too, that the great actor loves to portray; here he finds ample scope for his histrionic genius. Clayton Hamilton says:

"In history, we may observe the fact that the only plays which have ever survived their own generation in the theater have been plays which have afforded an outstanding opportunity for the exploitation of the actor's art. From the points of view of dramatic and literary criticism, it is probable that both 'Othello' and 'Macbeth' should be rated as greater achievements than the comparatively formless tragedy of 'Hamlet', yet 'Hamlet' is acted fifty times as often as 'Othello' or 'Macbeth', because it provides a very showy part in which every actor is ambitious to appear.

"A great dramatist, Alexandre Dumas fils, complained, toward the end of his distinguished career, that he was constantly exploited as the author of 'La Dame aux Camelias' -- a cheap and tawdry piece which he had written in eight days, at the early age of twenty-one. This drama, undeniably, is a lesser work of art than 'Le Demi-Monde' or half a dozen other compositions of the dramatist's maturity; yet it yielded to the theater a conspicuous acting part which every emotional actress, for a century, has been ambitious to essay.

"Similarly, the persistence on the stage, for so long a time after its first success, of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 'Richelieu' was due less to its literary, or even to its theatric, excellence than to the fact that ir provided a conspicuous opportunity for the exploitation of the actor's art.

"This play, first produced in 1839, was written for William Charles Macready and afforded that great actor one of the outstanding parts in his career. This central character became so celebrated that it was recreated by the foremost actors of the succeeding generation. In the United States, the character of Richelieu became one of the leading items in the repertory of the incomparable Edwin Booth, and it was the best of all the parts of

Lawrence Barrett; and, in England, this same character achieved a conspicuous position in the repertory of Sir Henry Irving. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, while the name and fame of Shakespeare still held dominion over the theaters of Great Britain and America, the general public, finding 'Richelieu' regularly alternated on the playbills with 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth', ascribed its authorship to Shakespeare, in utter ignorance of the historic fact that the Cardinal of France did not arrive at his maturity until half a century after the death of the Bard of Avon." (1)

When Walter Hampden, however, decided to add "Richelieu" to his repertoire, he found Bulwer's play in many ways unsuited for the present day theater. He, therefore, had Arthur Goodrich, whose dramatization of Browning's "Ring and the Book" he had already presented most successfully, adapt the original text of "Richelieu" so that the audiences of the present day might find in it both pleasure and profit.

Goodrich's Adaptation of Bulwer's Richelieu

It would be too long and too tiresome to compare at length Goodrich's revision with Bulwer's original play. The modern version is compressed into three acts, and takes but half the time that the original would use. Naturally, this compression speeds up the action of the plot, thereby heightening the emotional tension accompanying the rapid sequence of thrilling events.

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(1) Hamilton, Clayton: Introduction to "Richelieu", version by Arthur Goodrich

Many of Bulwer's poetical speeches have been criticised as ornate, lofty, and pretentious. It was this "premeditated fine writing" which infuriated Thackeray and precipitated the latter's attacks upon Bulwer in his "Yellowplush Papers." Now, this certain spaciousness of expression was well-suited to the taste of his century when people were "ear-minded" rather than "eye-minded." Mr. Goodrich undertook to rewrite much of Bulwer's play. In doing so, I feel, personally, that he has been far too drastic and has destroyed much of the poetic beauty of the original play. After all, Bulwer is a better poet than Goodrich, who seems to feel that blank verse is most successful when it can be made to sound like prose. He gives no heed to the appeal that "owes all its magic to the turn of the line, which lets you into the secret of its utterer's mood and temperament, not by its commonplace meaning, but by some subtle exaltation, or stultification, or slyness, or delicacy, or hesitancy, or what not in the sound of it."

In Bulwer's original play there are trifles like "asides", "soliloquies", "delayed action", which are mere specks of dust on a splendid picture. Goodrich has succeeded in brushing these specks off, but here and there he has brushed off some of the precious coloring of the

painting itself. Again and again in his revision he has reduced colorful, musical verse to what is practically prose. Here is just one passage taken at random. By searching again through both texts, I am sure I could find many better illustrations; but this will, I think, serve to show how Mr. Goodrich has altered beautiful poetry into prosaic verse.

Bulwer's Original Text

LOUIS. What means this false report of death,
Lord Cardinal?
RICHELIEU. Are you then anger'd, Sire, that
I live still?
LOUIS. No; but such artifice --
RICHELIEU. Not mine: -- Look
elsewhere!
Louis -- my castle swarm'd with the assassins.
BARADAS. Advancing. We have punished them already.
Huguet now
In the Bastille. -- Oh! my Lord, we were prompt
To avenge you -- we were --
RICHELIEU. We? -- Ha, ha! you hear,
My liege! What page, man, in the last court grammar
Made you a plural? Count, you have seized the hireling: --
Sire, shall I name the master?
LOUIS. Tush, my Lord,
The old contrivance: -- ever does your wit
Invent assassins, -- that ambition may
Slay rivals ---
RICHELIEU. Rivals, Sire, in what?
Service to France? I have none! Lives the man
Whom Europe, paled before your glory, deems
Rival to Armand Richelieu?
LOUIS. What, so haughty!
Remember, he who made, can unmake.

RICHELIEU. Never!
Never! Your anger can recall your trust,
Annul my office, spoil me of my lands,
Rifle my coffers, -- but my name -- my deeds,
Are royal in a land beyond your sceptre!
Pass sentence on me, if you will; from Kings,
Lo! I appeal to time!

* * * * * * * * * *

Sire, I know
Your smoother courtiers please you best -- nor measure
Myself with them, -- yet sometimes I would doubt
If Statesmen rock'd and dandled into power
Could leave such legacies to kings! (1)

Goodrich's Revision

LOUIS. What means this false report of death,
my lord?
RICHELIEU. Are you then angered, Sire, that I
still live?
LOUIS. No, but such artifice!
RICHELIEU. Not mine. Look elsewhere.
Louis, my palace swarmed with the assassins!
BARADAS. We've punished them already. Huguet lies
In the Bastille. My lord, see -- we were prompt
To avenge you, we were --
RICHELIEU. We! I trust you hear,
My Liege.
To Baradas.
What page, man, in the last court grammar,
Made you a plural? Count, you have seized the hireling.
To Louis.
Sire, shall I name the master? Loyalty
Masking disloyalty within.
LOUIS. I think
You talk of plots that you may so discredit
Your rivals.
RICHELIEU. Rivals, Sire in what? Service
To France? I have no rivals there.
LOUIS. So proud?
Remember, sir, the hand that made can unmake!

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(1) Bulwer: Richelieu, Act IV, Scene 1

RICHELIEU. Never! Your anger can annul my office,
Cancel my power, but not my name, my deeds.
From Kings, my Liege, I shall appeal to Time.
Revoke your trust in me, yet I shall leave you
Sole monarch of the mightiest realm in Europe,
Wealth, commerce, mastery. Be just. I know
Your smoother courtiers please you best, yet doubt
If statesmen rocked and dandled into power
Could leave such legacies to Kings. (1)

Why omit the forceful antithesis: Loyalty masking dis-loyalty within? In Louis's speech note the stinging contemptuousness of "Tush, my lord" to him who has wielded life and death in France. Compare the vivid personification in the picture of ambition like a remorseless assassin slaying its rivals with the flat, inane, prosaic words "that you may so discredit your rivals." What a mutilation we have in Richelieu's reply! How those three monosyllabic words in the original ring out: "I have none!" They are a challenge flung into the teeth of craven king and sycophant courtier. As he asks: "Lives the man whom Europe deems rival to Armand Richelieu?" we can see the tall, spare figure of the Cardinal draw itself up to its full, regal height; his piercing eye flash scathingly about the court; his voice vibrates with self-justification. Does Goodrich's curt answer embody this passion:

"Rivals, Sire in what? Service
To France? I have no rivals there."

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(1) Arthur Goodrich - Edward Bulwer-Lytton: Richelieu
Act III, Scene 2

In Bulwer's version, Richelieu's vindication always carries me back to Shylock's immortal vindication of himself before his Christian persecutors. Notice the ebb and flow of the music in Shylock's speech written, as it is, in poetical prose: "laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, etc." Compare the rhythm with "recall your trust, annul my office, spoil me of my lands, rifle my coffers, etc." Goodrich by destroying the stress has destroyed, too, the effective crescendo of passion. The word "Lo!" gives just the note of exaltation necessary to raise the superman above his fellows.

It may be said that Goodrich, as a producer, realized that the modern audience had no appreciation nor desire for such poetic music and therefore omitted as much of it as he could. If so, why did he not write the play over in prose? With regret I admit that the average person in the audience, interested in the drama passing before his eyes, would not be aware of any difference in the text if he were listening to the more prosaic Goodrich version. Perhaps George Bernard Shaw's ears would miss the true poetical music of the lines, but most of us are, alas, not gifted with such discernment. As Shaw himself says, most of us are as deaf as adders to the music of blank verse and to "the impression of moods and inflexions

of feeling conveyed by the word-music of poetry." Even great actors often miss this sense of music in a poetic play, and try to recite their parts as if they had been written in prose. But I still feel that this same average play-goer would depart from a more poetical revision than Mr. Goodrich has given us with a "numenous feeling" which, though he can neither analyze nor define it, warms his soul and thrills him to the profoundest depths of his being.

I was interested to read in the "New York Times" that Philip Molnar had cut Eugene O'Neill's "Strange Interlude" down to its present size from the much longer original manuscript. Evidently the original length would necessitate the audience's arriving before luncheon instead of before dinner. Molnar, of course, is a successful playwright himself, the author of "Lilliom" and "The Guardsman", plays which the Theater Guild produced recently in Boston. It is a comparatively easy matter for one who understands the exigencies of the theater to change the length of a play, to alter the exits and entrances, to cut out the obsolete "asides" -- these things are not vital. However, there are other things which are vital and, unless they are inherent in the play, no amount of tampering will make it anything but a failure. Most

heartily do I wish that Mr. Goodrich, in his revision of "Richelieu", had given poetry a better chance to prove its power to appeal to the modern playgoer. His play is a financial success both on Broadway and on tour, but I feel that the success is due to what still remains of Bulwer rather than to what has been interpolated by Goodrich.

TENNYSON'S POETICAL DRAMAS

Tennyson completed his "Idylls of the King," with the exception of "Balin and Balan," in 1872. Although the poet was then sixty-four years old, in the nineteen years left to him on earth he composed and published almost half of his entire output. Of this work, done between 1872 and 1892, more than half was in the field of dramatic poetry.

Considered in the light of quantity, Tennyson's plays total nearer one third than one quarter of his entire work. Considered as a part of the achievement by which he takes his place among the great English poets, they rank as a negligible quantity. The consensus of critical opinion, in taking the sum total of his work, is that Tennyson's dramas added nothing to his reputation as a poet and did nothing to win for him a reputation as a playwright. Still, they are works of merit, and five, at least, stood in the poet's own day, the acid test of stage presentation with some measure of success. However, the same may be said of Dryden's tragedies, which rank far higher in the dramatic scale than any that Tennyson wrote, and yet who would dream of reviving "All for Love" today?

Late Entrance into Dramatic Field

In 1875 Tennyson entered a new field of literature, and published his first poetical drama, "Queen Mary," which was played in the following year. Tennyson's dramatic development is as interesting to trace as it is remarkable to note. His early poems are conspicuously lacking in dramatic quality. At well-nigh the home stretch of his literary course, he suddenly detours into the field of the drama. Why, we wonder? At sixty-four years of age he published his first play, "Queen Mary." Up to this time, the most dramatic piece of writing that he had given to the world was the monodrama "Maud." But even here, it is the lyrical element in the poem that appeals to us, and in its passionate lyrical fervor lies its beauty, its strength, and its emotional appeal.

Success with Monodrama

It is interesting and significant to read what the poet himself says of this monodrama "Maud," this precursor to his later dramatic work. William J. Rolfe quotes Tennyson in an interesting note prefixed to the poem:

"The earlier critics of the poem failed to recognize its dramatic character. They ascribed to the author the thoughts and sentiments which he puts into the mouth of the morbid young man who is the dramatis persona; for, as in recent editions it has been designated, the poem is a 'monodrama,' and, in that respect, unique. Tennyson, when reading it to Mr. Knowles, said (as in substance he said when reading it to me): 'It should be called "Maud,"

or the "Madness." It is slightly akin to "Hamlet." No other poem (a monotone with plenty of change and no weariness) has been made into a drama where successive phases of passion in one person take the place of successive persons.' At the end of 'Maud' he declared, 'I've always said that "Maud" and "Guinevere" were the finest things I've written.'

"To Dr. Van Dyke, who in the first edition of 'The Poetry of Tennyson' had called 'Maud' a 'splendid failure,' he said: 'I want to read this to you because I want you to feel what the poem means. It is dramatic; it is the story of a man who has a morbid nature, with a touch of inherited insanity, and very selfish. The poem is to show what love does for him. The war is only an episode. You must remember that it is not I myself speaking. It is this man with the strain of madness in his blood, and the memory of a great trouble, and wrong that has put him out with the world.'

"I felt, when I heard the poet read 'Maud,' that it was the best possible commentary on the poem. I had not misunderstood it, as Dr. Van Dyke did at first, but the reading made me see heights and depths in it of which I had had no conception before. Especially was I amazed, as my friend was, at the intensity with which the poet had felt, and the tenacity with which he had pursued, the moral meaning of the poem. It was love, but not love in itself alone, as an emotion, an inward experience, a selfish possession, that he was revealing. It was love as a vital force, love as a part of life, love as an influence, -- nay, the influence which rescues the soul from the prison, or the madhouse, of self, and leads it into the larger, saner existence. This was the theme of 'Maud.' And the poet's voice brought it out, and rang the changes on it, so that it was unmistakable and unforgettable, -- the history of a man saved from selfish despair by a pure love."(1)

It is true that the poet in this monodrama does not utter a personal cry; he speaks through another. But merged into the personality of Maud's lover, the poet,

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(1) The Poetic Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Cambridge Edition, edited by W. J. Rolfe

through him, tells to us this song of a tortured soul. As someone has said, he consents to become objective only that his characters may become subjective.

Tennyson's first dramatic attempt evidently did not discourage him nor convince him of any lack of dramatic power in his poetic genius, for he steadily kept on producing play after play. It is all the more remarkable, too, that he pursued this strange bent unmindful of those critics who condemned and of those who condescended to bestow upon his efforts that faint praise which is so damning.

Naturally, to the critical world of his own day, the spectacle of an old man of sixty-six suddenly taking hold of a new literary vehicle, just as he had learned to use the old accustomed ones so skilfully, was a curious, if not exciting, experience. No longer a young genius learning his tools, but an acknowledged artist secure in his skilled technique, he once more set himself new goals to achieve, new skills to acquire. It is interesting to conjecture what might have been the result if Tennyson had made this departure at thirty-six, say, instead of sixty-six. For surely, his use of the dramatic vehicle did improve steadily as he worked on.

Tennyson's son says: "He had, however, always taken the liveliest interest in the theatre; and he bestowed infinite trouble on his dramas, choosing these three great

periods of 'Harold,' 'Becket,' and 'Mary,' so as to complete the line of Shakespeare's English chronicle-plays which end with the commencement of the Reformation. He was quite alive to the fact that for him to attempt this dramatic work would be at first unpopular, since he was then mainly regarded as an idyllic, or as a lyric, poet. But Spedding, a first-rate Shakespearian scholar, George H. Lewes and George Eliot admired his plays, and encouraged him to persevere in spite of all discouragement." (1)

It is to his credit that his dramatic work does show a steady rise in worth. "Harold" is better than "Queen Mary"; "Becket" is far better than "Harold," Suppose that death had not forced "Becket" to stand as the culmination of Tennyson's dramatic genius, would the nineteenth century have given to literature a name fit to be spoken in the same breath with, if not Shakespeare's, perhaps Marlowe's?

William Archer says: "I will confess that -- apart from Mr. Hardy's 'Dynasts' a magnificent epic rather than a drama -- Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' seems to me, of all the Elizabethanizing products, that which has most of the breath of life in it. If Tennyson had taken to drama earlier in life, and had been at the pains of studying its laws, I believe he had in him the makings of a great playwright. Even that comparatively feeble work 'Becket' had sufficient vitality to provide Sir Henry Irving with one of his most impressive characters." (2)

It is odd that Archer should rate "Queen Mary" so much higher in the dramatic scale than "Becket." "Feeble" does not seem to apply either to the character of the Archbishop himself nor to the play which takes its color

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son; page 174
(2) Archer, William: The Old Drama and the New, page 51

from his puissant personality. If "Queen Mary" is the poetical drama of the nineteenth century that "has most the breath of life in it" then all I can say is that the others must be dust, indeed.

In attempting to estimate the value of Tennyson's dramas, critics seem to be divided between two different standards of judgment. Some attempt to appraise their worth by judging them absolutely by intrinsic value as drama; whereas others attempt to appraise them in relation to Tennyson's other poetical works. Using the first critical yardstick, the question that must be answered is simply: Is the play a good play? Using the second, we must ask: Is it as good as the "Idylls of the King" or as good as "In Memoriam?" It seems to me that the first standard of judgment is the correct one. Is it a well-made play? Is it theatrically effective? Will it endure and carry its message effectively to succeeding generations of men? Is the author a great playwright as well as a great poet? This is the point of view that I have taken in attempting a criticism of Tennyson's poetical drama.

In my discussion of Tennyson's dramatic output, I have not taken the plays in the order of their sequence, but in what appears to me to be the order of their merit. "The Foresters," "The Promise of May," and "The Falcon," have very little dramatic interest, judged by either of

the standards mentioned above. "The Cup" stands on a very much higher dramatic level than any that these three attained. The three historical plays, "Queen Mary," "Harold," and "Becket," are by far the best that the poet produced and gain for him whatever merit he may possess as a dramatist.

The Foresters

Tennyson's romantic play, "The Foresters," founded on the story of Robin Hood and Maid Marian, was produced at Daly's Theater in New York, March 17, 1892, and was published soon afterwards. Miss Ada Rehan was the featured star in the American performance which seems to have been a success. "The Foresters" is, really, a masque. The play seems designed merely to provide a frame for elaborate pageantry interspersed with songs. The music for the songs was written by Sir Arthur Sullivan, who at that time in collaboration with W.S. Gilbert was enjoying great popularity in comic opera. The fairy interlude in the play is perhaps the worst thing that Tennyson ever wrote and the humorous passages are terribly forced and mechanical. According to all accounts, the man Tennyson seems to have possessed a rich sense of humor, but except in his Lincolnshire verses, we scarcely ever find any humor at all in his work. Certainly the humor in "The Foresters" cannot even compare with the engaging

comedy furnished by Gilbert and Sullivan in such pieces as "Pinafore" and "The Mikado". One would scarcely recognize in Tennyson's "Tit" and "Ob" the dainty "Titania" and "Oberon" of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

"TITANIA. Nip him not, but let him snore.
We must flit for evermore.

FIRST FAIRY.
Tit, my queen, must it be so?
Wherefore, wherefore should we go?

TITANIA. I Titania bid you flit,
And you dare to call me Tit.

FIRST FAIRY.
Tit, for love and brevity,
Not for love of levity.

TITANIA. Pertest of our flickering mob,
Wouldst thou call my Oberon Ob?

FIRST FAIRY.
Nay, an please your Elfin Grace,
Never Ob before his face." (1)

THE PROMISE OF MAY

In November, 1882, a fourth drama, written for the most part in prose and called "The Promise of May", was acted in London. It was produced by Mrs. Bernard Beere at the Globe Theater. Evidently the London audiences did not take kindly to the play because one of the witticisms of the day was the saying that the poet laureate, after

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: The Foresters; Act II, Scene II

filling the world with his verse, was now emptying the Globe with his prose. The character of Edgar certainly is not in Tennyson's usual vein. It has not the ring of true worth, and affects most critics as a deplorably weak piece of characterization. I am sure that there must have been some spectators in that audience at the Globe in 1882 who keenly regretted that they were not licensed to show their contempt for that detestable prig Edgar after the manner of their franker Elizabethan ancestors. Comtemporary criticism, however, showed Tennyson what a failure he had offered to English drama in the character of Edgar. As "The Promise of May" is practically a prose play, it does not enter into the present discussion.

THE FALCON

In 1879 "The Falcon," a rather fantastic, light play, was produced at the St. James Theater in London by Mr. and Mrs. Kendal. It is a one-act play based on the well-k nown Italian story of Count Federigo and Monna Giovanna told by Boccaccio, and already retold in English verse by Barry Cornwall and Longfellow. The play enjoyed a run of sixty-seven nights at the St. James. (1)

William Archer who saw the Kendals in the play was

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son

very much impressed with the performance:

"If there ever was a play worthily placed upon the stage, that play was 'The Falcon.' Its scene was a masterpiece of quiet and tasteful art, every detail was studied and complete, the dresses were exquisite, and the mere stage-picture was, to my mind, sufficient to have provided an 'entire evening's entertainment.' Moreover, Mrs. Kendal looked extremely handsome, and played very respectably as Ser Federigo; and I should exhaust my superlatives and my reader's credence were I to attempt to describe Mr. Kendal as Monna Giovanna. She was a living poem in her gracious stateliness and queenly yet tender womanhood. . How came it then that the production was a failure? I answer that it was killed by the Press. . The play was not strong enough meat for them, while the falcon, on the other hand, was too strong for their stomachs. They chose to consider Ser Federigo's sacrifice ludicrous if not disgusting, and they said so with the fine outspokenness which now and then characterizes critical utterances. The consequence was that a production which in every way did credit to the English stage was received with indifference by the public." (1)

Rolfe prefixes this note to "The Falcon" in his collection of Tennyson's works:

"The story, which the poet took from Boccaccio (Decameron, 5th Day, 9th tale), has been traced to the Sanskrit 'Panchatantra.' La Fontaine gives it in his 'Contes et Nouvelles' ('Le Faucon'), and Longfellow in his 'Tales of a Wayside Inn' ('The Falcon of Ser Federigo'). It was also dramatized by Delisle de la Drevetiere as a three-act comedy."(2)

Count Federigo Degli Alberighe has loved for ten long years the beautiful Giovanna, a wealthy widow whose life is devoted to her invalid son, Florio. Although the lady returns the Count's love, a family feud between the two houses forbids her ever disclosing this fact to him:

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son
(2) Archer, William: English Dramatists of Today

". . . . I can never marry him.
His grandsire struck my gransire in a brawl
At Florence, and my grandsire stabb'd him there.
The feud between our houses is the bar
I cannot cross; I dare not brave my brother,
Break with my kin. My brother hates him, scorns
The noblest-natured man alive. . . . ." (1)

When Giovanna was but fifteen, Federigo had sat beside her at a rustic festival and her exceeding beauty had inspired him with an undying love. He had made a wreath of mountain flowers, tied it with a ribbon from her hair, and crowned her Queen of Beauty. Called away at that moment, he returned to find the lady gone and the chaplet, the offering of his love, flung upon the grass.

Thinking his love rejected, Federigo had gone off to the wars, and the next year Giovanna married. Federigo after heroic soldiering returns and, finding Giovanna a widow, again offers her his devotion. That she does not return his affection never dampens his ardor. He impoverishes himself sending her rich gifts and, one by one, all his choicest possessions. His last gift, a diamond necklace, has reduced him to absolute want. His castle gone, he lives now in a humble cottage with his old nurse Elisabetta and her crotchety son Filippo. When the play opens, we find not enough in the larder even for a breakfast. Stripped of every possession, Federigo has still

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(1) Tennyson: The Falcon

one pride and joy left to him -- his noble falcon. This bird he loves as if it were a kindred soul, the only one left to him in his impoverished life.

"My princess of the cloud, my plumed purveyor,
My far-eyed queen of the winds -- thou that canst soar
Beyond the morning lark and, howsoe'er
Thy quarry wind and wheel swoop down upon him
Eagle-like, lightning-like -- strike, make his feathers
Glance in mid heaven.
I would thou hadst a mate!
Thy breed will die with thee, and mine with me;
I am as lone and loveless as thyself." (1)

To Federigo's humble cottage comes the Lady Giovanna. She has a boon to ask of the Count but first she will take breakfast with him. Desperate in his poverty, Federigo whispers an agitated command to Filippo. The Count tells the lady of his love, his only solace when lanquishing in an enemy prison, now his one gleam in the midst of his dark, chill penury. Elisabetta enters with a bird upon a dish: "Here's a fine fowl for my lady. I hope he be not underdone for we be undone in the doing of him." The lady eats but Federigo has suddenly lost his appetite. He begs to know the boon which takes such courage on Giovanna's part to ask and learns that it is his hawk which she desires for her sick son. The boy has a strange fancy that he would be well again if the Count would but

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(1) Tennyson: The Falcon

give him his falcon. So Giovanna has come to ask for the only beautiful thing left to him. Is his love for her great enough to consent to this sacrifice, she wonders? Federigo then confesses that he has killed his noble bird that his adored lady might be served with a breakfast under his roof:

"Stay, stay, I am most unlucky, most unhappy!
You never had look'd in on me before,
And when you came and dipt your soverign head
Thro' these low doors, you ask'd to eat with me.
I had but emptiness to set before you,
No, not a draught of milk, no, not an egg,
Nothing but my brave bird, my noble falcon,
My comrade of the house, and of the field.
She had to die for it -- she died for you.
Perhaps I thought with those of old, the nobler
The victim was, the more acceptable
Might be the sacrifice. I fear you scarce
Will thank me for your entertainment now." (1)

Overcome by this revelation of Federigo's love, Giovanna can restrain her heart no longer and she cries:

"O Federigo, Federigo, I love you!
Spite of ten thousand brothers, Federigo!" (2)

Federigo receives his happiness with great joy and the play closes with his exclamation:

"The purpose of my being is accomplish'd
And I am happy!" (3)

It is hard to conceive of this play's having the ability to hold a London audience for sixty-seven nights. It has very little either of character or incident in it.

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(1) Tennyson: The Falcon
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.

Federigo, the hero, fails to evoke much sympathy. We cannot feel moved to any pity for the misfortunes of a man who starves, and forces his aged nurse and foster-brother to starve with him, while he sends priceless diamonds to a wealthy lady, indifferent to his love. Federigo's conduct is highly irrational, and far from sympathizing with him, we feel angry that he could be such a fool.

Tennyson's dramatic technique in this play leaves much to be desired. In a one-act play, it takes great skill to introduce the antecedent action ingeniously by means of the dialogue. In "The Falcon" we have ten years to be accounted for and Tennyson, lacking time and skill, has had to fall back on the soliloquy. Shakespeare never uses the soliloquy to sum up the antecedent action nor to feed to the audience facts necessary to the understanding of the plot. Rather do his soliloquies serve as an x-ray picture of the minds and souls of his characters, allowing us to see the passions that motivate their actions. In the following soliloquy uttered by Lady Giovanna almost immediately upon her entrance, we find out why she has come to visit the Count, how great the sacrifice is that she asks, her son's illness, and the history of the ancient feud between the two houses. We have, in fact, twenty-eight lines of necessary information just handed over the

footlights by the playwright:

LADY GIOVANNA. "His falcon, and I come to ask
for his falcon,
The pleasure of his eyes -- boast of his hand --
Pride of his heart -- the solace of his hours --
His one companion here -- nay, I have heard
That, thro' his late magnificence of living
And this last costly gift to mine own self
[Shows diamond necklace.]
He hath become so beggar'd that his falcon
Even wins his dinner for him in the field.
That must be talk, not truth, but, truth or talk,
How can I ask for his falcon?
[Rises and moves as she speaks.]
O my sick boy!
My daily fading Florio, it is thou
Hath set me this hard task, for when I say,
What can I do -- what can I get for thee?
He answers, 'Get the Count to give me his falcon,
And that will make me well.' Yet if I ask,
He loves me, and he knows I know he loves me!
Will he not pray me to return his love --
To marry him? -- [pause] -- I can never marry him.
His grandsire struck my grandsire in a brawl!
At Florence, and my grandsire stabb'd him there.
The feud between our houses is the bar
I cannot cross; I dare not brave my brother,
Break with my kin. My brother hates him, scorns
The noblest-natured man alive and I --
Who have that reverence for him that I scarce
Dare beg him to receive his diamonds back --
How can I, dare I, ask him for his falcon?" (1)

Then, too, the climax of the play, the sacrifice of the hawk, is according to our modern point of view too trivial to serve as a dramatic motif. Most of us cannot follow the Count to the emotional heights to which he is transported in the dénouement where he exclaims:

"She had to die for it -- she died for you."

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(1) Tennyson: The Falcon

Pretty as an Italian tale, it seems to lose its charm when taken out of its original Latin setting, and to the Anglo-Saxon mind seems a bit bizarre. We wonder how the author of "Becket" and "Queen Mary" ever came to consider such exotic material as fitting for dramatic treatment.

Fanny Kemble who saw the play performed at the St. James's said that it was "an exquisite little poem in action, like one of Alfred de Musset's, such as 'Les Caprices de Marianne.'"

Tennyson himself seemed to be satisfied with the production by the Kendals. He said, "Mrs. Kendal looked magnificent, and Kendal spoke his lines well."(1)

THE CUP

In 1881 "The Cup" a tragedy in two acts, was brought out at the Lyceum Theater, under the direction of Henry Irving. Tennyson's son tells us in his "Memoir" that this play was begun in November, 1879, after his father had finished "The Falcon," and completed in 1880. It was not published, however, until 1884. It was produced by Irving at the Lyceum Theater in January, 1881, and ran at that time for more than one hundred and thirty consecutive nights.(2) Parker states that the play ran through one

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son , page 242
(2) Ibid.

hundred and twenty-eight performances at the Lyceum. According to Archer, "The Cup" is the only play of Tennyson's that attained financial success.

Tennyson wrote this play at the request of Henry Irving:

"I gave Irving my 'Thomas Becket': he said it was magnificent but it would cost him three thousand pounds to mount it: he couldn't afford the risk. If well put on the stage it would act for a time, and it would bring me credit (he said), but it wouldn't pay. He said, 'If you give me something short I'll do it.' So I wrote him a play in two acts 'The Cup.' The success of a piece doesn't depend on its literary merit or even on its stage effect, but on its hitting somehow. Miss Terry said, 'We act mechanically after a long run, but on a first night nobody suspects how we have our hearts in our mouths.' . . . The worst of writing for the stage is, you must keep some actor always in your mind." (1)

On December 4, 1880, Sheridan Knowles, who was then manager at the Lyceum, asked Tennyson to read his play to the company that was going to perform it, and Tennyson accepted the invitation:

"Irving is in a great state of enthusiasm and excitement, and he is most anxious that you should read over the Play, not only to himself and Ellen Terry but to all the Company which is to enact it. This is a most admirable suggestion, and I hope extremely that you will see your way to say 'yes' to it. He would like it to be on next Thursday week, the 25th inst., when Ellen Terry will be back in town and everything advanced enough to make such a reading of the greatest and most opportune value." (2)

The following quotation from the Memoir shows how much Tennyson was indebted to Irving's collaboration for

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son , page 258
(2) Ibid., page 259

the stage success of the play. It was Irving who designed all the stage settings, a factor of no small importance in considering the play's successful reception by the public.

". . . . . happily but few alterations from the first manuscript copy were found necessary for the stage-edition. Three short speeches for Synorix were added, Act I. Sc. 3; and at the end of Act II. the quarrel between Sinnatus and Synorix was lengthened by two lines, and Camma was made to interrogate Sinnatus as to what Synorix had said, and three or four entrances were made less abrupt. Irving inserted most of the stage-directions, and devised the magnificent scenery, and the drama was produced by him with signal success at the Lyceum, and played to crowded houses. He wrote to my father, 'I hope that the splendid success of your grand Tragedy will be followed by other triumphs equally great.'" (1)

In the Lyceum production Miss Ellen Terry played the part of Camma most successfully. She was immensely pleased with the role and thanked Tennyson for his "great little play." We can well imagine that the histrionic ability of Miss Terry did much to make Camma a very real and appealing woman. Irving himself played the part of the villain Synorix but not wholly to Tennyson's liking:

"Irving has not hit off my Synorix, who is a subtle blend of Roman refinement and intellectuality, and barbarian, self-satisfied sensuality." (2)

When Mary Anderson was playing "The Winter's Tale" in London, she asked Tennyson if she might produce "The Cup". He was delighted and wrote four new lines for her,

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son , pages 258-259
(2) Ibid., page 259

to be sung before the priestesses in the Temple:

"Artemis, Artemis, hear us, O mother, hear us and
bless us!
Artemis, thou that art life to the wind, to the wave,
to the glebe, to the fire,
Hear thy people who praise thee! O help us from all
that oppress us.
Hear thy priestesses hymn thy glory! O yield them all
their desire." (1)

The story is taken from Plutarch. It first appealed to Tennyson as possible dramatic material when he read the following paragraph in Lecky's "History of European Morals":

"A powerful noble once solicited the hand of a Galatian lady named Camma, who, faithful to her husband, resisted all his entreaties. Resolved at any hazard to succeed, he caused her husband to be assassinated, and when she took refuge in the temple of Diana, and enrolled herself among the priestesses, he sent noble after noble to induce her to relent. After a time he ventured himself into her presence. She feigned a willingness to yield, but told him it was first necessary to make a libation to the goddess. She appeared as a priestess before the altar bearing in her hand a cup of wine, which she had poisoned. She drank half of it herself, handed the remainder to her guilty lover, and when he had drained the cup to the dregs, burst into a fierce thanksgiving that she had been permitted to avenge, and was soon to rejoin, her murdered husband." (2)

Sir Charles Newton helped Tennyson in the archaeology of the period. On March 6, 1879, he wrote to the poet:

"I see no reason for doubting Plutarch's statement that Artemis was worshipped in Galatia, tho' it is not corroborated as yet by coins or inscriptions, and the particular Artemis so worshipped would most probably be closely allied in attributes to the Tauric Artemis, and would thus correspond with your conception of the Galatian Artemis (the goddess of nature). The epithet πατρῷος in the 'Amatorius' applied to the priesthood shows that the priesthood was hereditary. It may be inferred, therefore, that Camma was

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(1)Tennyson, Alfred: The Cup
(2)Lecky: History of European Morals

of noble birth. The story as told by Plutarch is most dramatic. If I find anything more you shall have it. In the meantime, you may rely on my silence." (1)

Tennyson gives us in this little play a truly tragical theme set forth with great poetical beauty. Synorix, formerly tetrarch of Galatia but expelled as a tyrant and a libertine, flees to Rome. After three years he returns with the conquering Roman legions, the tool and pawn of the mighty conqueror of the world, hoping by his infamous treachery to betray his native soil into the hands of its enemy. In his breast he bears, also, the memory of Camma, the noble wife of the present tetrarch, to whom he sends a sacred cup, stolen from a temple of Artemis. His base designs upon Camma necessitate the removal of her husband, Sinnatus, and to this end he hopes to accomplish the tetrarch's overthrow by accusing him of treason toward Rome. Gaining entrance to the tetrarch's home, he tells Camma that her husband's anti-Roman activities have been discovered. He advises her to throw herself upon the mercy of the Roman general, Antonius, who is to pass before the temple of Artemis on the following morning, and to beg indemnity for her husband. Although Sinnatus has discovered the stranger to be the false Synorix, Camma goes to the temple, telling her husband to follow her if she does not return soon. Without the temple waits Synorix to tell

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(1)Tennyson's Memoirs, by his son , page 257

Camma that Antonius has changed his plans. He presses his love upon her until now, fully aware of his base designs, she draws the dagger which she has concealed upon her person. Disarming her, Synorix plunges the dagger into the heart of Sinnatus, who has come just at that moment to his wife's rescue. Camma flees into the temple leaving Synorix baffled but not daring to violate the sanctuary of the sacred shrine of Artemis, nor yet willing to give up his pursuit of a guilty love. Act I. ends with this strong climax:

[Enter SINNATUS. Seizes SYNORIX from behind by the throat.]
SYNORIX. [throttled and scarce audible.]
Rome! Rome!
SINNATUS. Adulterous dog!
SYNORIX. [stabbing him with CAMMA'S dagger.] What! will you have it?
[CAMMA utters a cry and runs to SINNATUS.]
SINNATUS. [Falls backward.] I have it in my heart -- to the Temple -- fly --
For my sake -- or they seize on thee. Remember!
Away -- farewell! Dies.
CAMMA. [Runs up the steps into the Temple, looking back.] Farewell!
SYNORIX. [Seeing her escape.] The women of the Temple drag her in.
Publius! Publius! No,
Antonius would not suffer me to break
Into the sanctuary. She hath escaped.
[Looking down at SINNATUS.]
'Adulterous dog!' that red-faced rage at me?
Then with one quick short stab -- eternal peace.
So end all passions. Then what use in passions?
To warm the cold bonds of our dying life
And, lest we freeze in mortal apathy,
Employ us, heat us, quicken us, help us, keep us
From seeing all too near that urn, those ashes
Which must all be. Well used, they serve us well.
I heard a saying in Egypt, that ambition
Is like the sea wave, which the more you drink
The more you thirst -- yea -- drink too much, as men

Have done on rafts of wreck -- it drives you mad.
I will be no such wreck, am no such gamester
As, having won the stake, would dare the chance
Of double, or losing all. The Roman Senate,
For I have always play'd into their hands,
Means me the crown. And Camma for my bride --
The people love her -- if I win her love,
They too will cleave to me, as one with her.
There then I rest, Rome's tributary king.
Looking down on SINNATUS.
Why did I strike him? -- having proof enough
Against the man, I surely should have left
That stroke to Rome. He saved my life too. Did he?
It seemed so. I have play'd the sudden fool.
And that sets her against me -- for the moment.
Camma -- well, well, I never found the woman
I could not force or wheedle to my will.
She will be glad at last to wear my crown.
And I will make Galatia prosperous too,
And we will chirp among our vines, and smile
At bygone things till that (pointing to SINNATUS
eternal peace.
Rome! Rome!
[Enter Publius and Soldiers.]
Twice I cried Rome. Why came ye not before?
PUBLIUS. Why come we now? Whom shall we seize upon?
SYNORIX [pointing to the body of SINNATUS] The body
of that dead traitor Sinnatus.
Bear him away.
[Music and Singing in Temple.] (1)

Act II. finds Camma chosen priestess of the Temple. Synorix, crowned king of Galatia by a grateful Rome, sues for her hand in marriage. The death of Sinnatus was a bitter mistake, as his messenger explains to Camma:

". . . . . When he struck at Sinnatus --
As I have many a time declared to you --
He knew not at the moment who had fasten'd
About his throat -- he begs you to forget it
As scarce his act -- a random stroke. All else
Was love for you; he prays you to believe him." (2)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: The Cup, Act I, Scene 3
(2) Ibid., Act II, Scene 1

Camma, as the priestess, accomplishing her firm purpose of revenge, is a most impressive and dramatic figure. Like an oracle, she speaks now in a riddling utterance, and now with a lyrical prophecy that has about it the deep tragedy of her coming death. She consents to wed her husband's murderer. From his coronation comes the false Synorix, accompanied by the Roman dignitaries, and before the high altar of the priestess the solemn marriage rites take place.

At the end of the ceremony, the Priestess says:

"It is our ancient custom in Galatia
That ere two souls be knit for life and death,
They two should drink together from one cup,
In symbol of their married unity,
Making libation to the Goddess. Bring me
The costly wines we use in marriages
[They bring in a large jar of wine. Camma pours wine into cup.]
To SYNORIX. See here, I fill it. [To ANTONIUS.] Will you drink, my lord?
ANTONIUS. I? Why should I? I am not to be married.
CAMMA. But that might bring a Roman blessing on us.
ANTONIUS. [Refusing cup.] Thy pardon, priestess!
CAMMA. Thou are in the right.
This blessing is for Synorix and for me.
See, first I make libation to the Goddess.
[Makes libation.]
And now I drink.
[Drinks and fills the cup again.]
Thy turn, Galatian King.
Drink and drink deep -- our marriage will be fruitful.
Drink and drink deep, and thou wilt make me happy.
[Synorix goes up to her. She hands him the cup. He drinks.] (1)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: The Cup , Act II, Scene 1

From his own cup, he drinks the poisoned wine and so does she. Together, amid the lament of the priestesses, the wonder of the Roman onlookers, the dawning comprehension of the attending Galatians, these two souls wing their way into eternity.

The play is rich in beautiful, poetical passages. We have an exquisite invocation to the goddess Artemis, the goddess of birth and the goddess of death, sublime in its emotional setting as in its poetical beauty:

SYNORIX. O thou that dost inspire the germ of life,
The child, a thread within the house of birth,
And give him limbs, then air, and send him forth
The glory of his father -- thou whose breath
Is balmy wind to robe our hills with grass,
And kindle all our vales with myrtle-blossom,
And roll the golden oceans of our grain,
And sway the long grape-bunches of our vines,
And fill all hearts with fatness and the lust
Of plenty -- make me happy in my marriage!
CHORUS [chanting] Artemis, Artemis, hear him,
Ionian Artemis!
CAMMA. O thou that slayest the babe within the womb
Or in the being born, or after slayest him
As boy or man, great Goddess, whose storm-voice
Unsockets the strong oak, and rears his root
Beyond his head, and strows our fruits, and lays
Our golden grain, and runs to sea and makes it
Foam over all the fleeted wealth of kings
And peoples, hear!
Whose arrow is the plague -- whose quick flash splits
The mid-sea mast, and rifts the tower to the rock,
And hurls the victor's column down with him
That crowns it, hear!
Who causest the safe earth to shudder and gape,
And gulf and flatten in her closing chasm
Doomed cities, hear!
Whose lava-torrents blast and blacken a province
To a cinder, hear!
Whose winter-cataracts find a realm and leave it
A waste of rock and ruin, hear! I call thee

To make my marriage prosper to my wish!
CHORUS. Artemis, Artemis, hear me, Ephesian Artemis!
CAMMA. Artemis, Artemis, hear me, Galatian Artemis!
I call on our own Goddess in our own Temple.
CHORUS. Artemis, Artemis, hear her, Galatian Artemis! (1)

Truly Shakespearian is Camma's impassioned defense of hopeless rebellion:

". . . . Sir, if a state submit
At once, she may be blotted out at once
And swallow'd in the conqueror's chronicle.
Whereas in wars of freedom and defence
The Glory and grief of battle won or lost
Solders a race together -- yea -- tho' they fail,
The names of those who fought and fell are like
A bank'd-up fire that flashes out again
From century to century, and at last
May lead them on to victory -- I hope so --
Like phantoms of the Gods."(2)

Scarcely less beautiful is the triumphant cry of the victorious villain Synorix at the pinnacle of his fame. Here we have a splendid example of the dramatic effectiveness of what Aristotle calls "Peripetia." Glutted with joy, crowned king of the land he has betrayed, his unholy love possessed of its victim, he yet stands beside the cup which holds his doom, smiling into the eyes of her who carries his death potion.

SYNORIX. Hail, Queen!
The wheel of Fate has roll'd me to the top.
I would that happiness were gold, that I
Might cast my largess of it to the crowd!
I would that every man made feast today,
Beneath the shadow of our pines and planes!

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: The Cup , Act I, Scene 2
(2) Ibid.

For all my truer life begins today.
The past is like a travell'd land now sunk
Below the horizon -- like a barren shore
That grew salt weeds, but now all drown'd in love
And glittering at full tide -- the bounteous bays
And havens filling with a blissful sea.
Nor speak I now too mightily, being King
And happy! happiest, lady, in my power
To make you happy." (1)

But despite the strength of the theme and the portrait of Camma, we are conscious in this drama of a clumsy technique, of the playwright's lack of ease as yet with his chosen medium. Tennyson makes too great a use of trite situations and obsolete, or obsolescent conventions. The arch-hypocrite, Synorix, coveting his neighbor's wife, and seeking to rid himself of the husband, has nothing novel to recommend it. The extensive use of the "aside" is lamentable. For example, we have these stage directions:

"Enter ATTENDANT.
ATTENDANT (aside) My lord, the men!
SINNATUS (aside.) Our anti-Roman faction?
ATTENDANT (aside.) Ay, my lord.
SYNORIX (overhearing.) (Aside.) I have enough -- their anti-Roman faction.
SINNATUS. (aloud.) Some friends of mine would speak with me without.
You, Strato, make good cheer till I return. [Exit.] " (2)

It seems as if the most gullible of audiences must tumble to the fact that Sinnatus says, "Our anti-Roman faction!" for the pure unadulterated purpose of having Synorix say, "Aha! their anti-Roman faction!" This is worthy of melodrama but not of high tragedy.

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: The Cup, Act II, Scene 1
(2) Ibid., Act I, Scene 2

The revenge motive on which the play turns is imitative of the Elizabethan tragedy of blood and was far from new to the English stage. It is true that Shakespeare sublimated this old motive into his "Hamlet" but it is just another example of the way in which that superb dramatic genius could take the crude, melodramatic currency of his day and recreate it into the stuff of which great drama is born.

Notwithstanding some very fine dramatic situations and some excellent poetry, "The Cup" falls short of great drama, and fails to arouse much emotional reaction in the ordinary man of the audience. The characters, though carefully and consistently drawn, with the possible exception of Camma herself, lack vitality and vividness. Not one of them can take his place in the dramatic hall of fame. Although, I imagine, a talented actress like Miss Terry and a manager with a flair for the theatrically effective could do much for this play, still that action and interaction, that play and interplay of character which is the breath of drama is not to be found here.

Historical Trilogy

Any fame Tennyson has achieved as a dramatic artist, if any fame is his, rests upon his three historical plays: "Queen Mary," "Harold," and "Becket." These pieces, differing widely as they do in their subjects, all have a

common character. They are all dramas based on English history, all breathing England's ideals, her traditions, her conflicts. Their main interest lies, not so much in the actual plot or in the characters, as it does in their dramatic presentation of some critical period in the life of the nation. "Harold" is the dramatization of the contest between Norman and Saxon rather than the story of a single ruler's rise and fall. In "Queen Mary" the central theme is the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. While in "Becket" we hear again the rumble of that mighty war fought for supremacy in the state between the temporal and the spiritual power. All three contain in a high degree Brunetière's requisite ingredient, conflict.

These three plays show clearly Tennyson's gain in dramatic skill. "Becket," the one written last, is far less abstract and far less political than the other two. However, all three are found to possess the same limitations. In all of them, Tennyson has interested himself in depicting the general aspect of some large political conflict rather than in viewing such a movement merely as furnishing the motives which underlie human conduct, and as providing the reasons for personal behavior. He never makes the conflict a curtain against which we see those individual differnces that make distinct personalities.

In Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" we are not interested in the Civil War because it tore Rome asunder, laid the mighty Caesar low, and finally served as a means of transition to the empire of Octavius. Far from it! We are interested in this political upheaval because it fired the patriotism of Brutus until he felt it necessary to kill his best friend for what he thought was the general good of Rome. It is the personality of Brutus that doth bestride the historical conflict like a Colossus, indeed. Brutus, Cassius, Anthony, Octavius -- here are men, born of great times and great events, the clash of whose wills and desires makes the chief interest of the play. We look behind them for the political movements of which they are a part and an expression. In Tennyson no such personalities thrill us -- the events overshadow them and stifle their being. Tennyson's characters are puppets and he holds the strings that control their actions; they do not move and breathe and have their being as real characters in a world of reality.

QUEEN MARY

"Queen Mary," the first of the historical plays, was published in 1875 and acted at the Lyceum, April 18, 1876. Tennyson himself called this play a chronicle play and the term is peculiarly suitable to its wide historical

scope and its comprehensive view of the period involved. With respect to character painting, the poet considered "Queen Mary" the most successful of his plays. When produced at the Lyceum, Henry Irving played the role of Philip and Miss Kate Bateman played Queen Mary. "Miss Bateman played some of her part finely", says the poet's son, "and Irving's 'Philip' my father always pronounced to be a consummate performance, ranking it for powerful conception of character with Salvini's 'Othello.'. . . On the Australian stage Miss Dargon won a triumph in 'Queen Mary.' It was very popular when produced at the Melbourne Theater Royal, and had a long run; and when reproduced at the Bijou Theater in the same city had a second long run." (1)

Mary Tudor, queen of England, is fired with two great loves: her love for her faith, and her love for her affianced husband, Philip of Spain. In spite of the protests of Council and people, she determines to ally England with Spain and force Catholicism upon her people. A rebellion led by Sir Thomas Wyatt fails and Mary, now supreme, cries, "My foes are at my feet, and I am Queen!" The marriage of the sovereigns of England and Spain takes place, while from everyside ill-concealed hatred for the

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(1) Tennyson's Memoirs, by his son, page 179, footnote

Spaniard smoulders and burns. Cardinal Pole, the Legate of the Pope and Mary's cousin, returns from Rome to receive England back into the church. Mary, her marriage over, now turns her attentions to the religious question with all the zeal of a fanatic's frenzy. The persecution under which England now suffers forms a major part of the play, and Tennyson gives us the picture of a land torn between religious and political intrigue. Cramner is tried and burned at the stake. Meanwhile Philip, to whom this wife, eleven years older than himself, is fast growing repugnant, leaves for Spain; and Mary, unloved, childless, alone, tastes the bitterness and humiliation of her marriage. Her life denied of love, her hopes thwarted, her kingdom one seething mass of treachery, rebellion, and intrigue, Mary finds the burden of life too great and dies, worn out before her time. Elizabeth's succession to the throne forms the dénouement.

That the author of "Queen Mary" was not a man of the theater is obvious to him who reads. Imagine forty-five named and separately-listed characters! Besides this appalling list, the play calls for mobs, courtiers, attendants, men at arms, etc. Here are the actors and actresses specified by the author:

Dramatis Personae

Queen Mary
Philip, King of Naples and Sicily, afterwards King of Spain
The Princess Elizabeth
Reginald Pole, Cardinal and Papal Legate
Simon Renard, Spanish Ambassador
Le Sieur De Noailles, French Ambassador
Thomas Cramner, Archbishop of Canterbury
Sir Nicholas Heath, Archbishop of York
Edward Courtenay, Earl of Devon
Lord William Howard, afterwards Lord Howard, and Lord High Admiral
Lord Williams of Thame
Lord Paget
Lord Petre
Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor
Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London
Thomas Thirlby, Bishop of Ely
Sir Thomas Wyatt } Insurrectionary Leaders
Sir Thomas Stafford }
Sir Ralph Bagenhall
Sir Robert Southwell
Sir Henry Bedingfield
Sir William Cecil
Sir Thomas White
The Duke of Alva } Attending on Philip
The Count de Feria }
Peter Martyr
Father Cole
Father Bourne
Villa Garcia
Soto
Captain Brett } Adherents of Wyatt
Anthony Knyvett }
Peters, Gentleman of Lord Howard
Roger, Servant to Noailles
William, Servant to Wyatt
Steward of Household to the Princess Elizabeth
Old Nokes and Nokes
Marchioness of Exeter, Mother of Courtenay
Lady Clarence } Ladies in Waiting to the Queen
Lady Magdalen Dacres }
Alice
Maid of Honor to the Princess Elizabeth
Joan } Two Country Wives
Tib }

Lords and other Attendants, Members of the Privy Council, Members of Parliament, Two Gentlemen, Aldermen, Citizens, Peasants, Ushers, Messengers, Guards, Pages, Gospellers, Marshalmen, etc. (1)

Tennyson evidently realized the limitations of an overcrowded stage, for he diminished his number of characters in "Harold" to twenty-three, and in "Becket" to twenty-five.

Queen Mary is supposed to be the moving force of this play, just as Macbeth and Hamlet are in the plays that bear their names. It is interesting to compare the dramatic preparation that Shakespeare makes for his leading characters with that made by Tennyson in "Queen Mary." In the first scene of "Hamlet" Horatio advises his companion to

". . . . impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?" (2)

In Scene II we meet the young prince himself. To make his melancholy and his isolation in the midst of all these marriage festivities all the more apparent, Shakespeare has the buoyant Laertes beside him, filled with the joie de vivre and the quest for adventure. In "Macbeth" the weird sisters, strange portents of evil, arrange to meet Macbeth upon the blasted Scottish heath. Duncan praises the valor

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Queen Mary
(2) Shakespeare, William: Hamlet, Act I, Scene I

of the loyal general who has that day delivered King and country from its enemies. With two such different impressions created about him, Macbeth at last enters with Banquo to be almost immediately accosted by the witches.

Most playwrights, like Shakespeare, work for a strong entrance for their leading characters, but witness how Tennyson introduces England's queen, an English Tudor and a Spanish Arragon. In the fourth scene of the first act, Courtenay is forcing his suit upon the young Princess Elizabeth when she spies a skulking figure at the door of the chamber. Notice the stage direction "behind."

Enter MARY, behind.

MARY. Whispering -- leagued together
To bar me from my Philip.
COURTENAY. Pray -- consider --
ELIZABETH. seeing the Queen. Well, that's a noble horse of yours, my lord.
I trust that he will carry you well today,
And heal your headache.
COURTENAY. You are wild; what headache?
Heartache, perchance; not headache.
ELIZABETH. aside to Courtenay Are you blind?
Courtenay sees the Queen and exits. Exit Mary. (1)

The professor of drama with whom I studied was prone, every now and again, to ask us to find a motive for the entrances and exits made by the various characters in the particular play under discussion at that moment. I could not but wonder, as I read the passage that I have just quoted,

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Queen Mary, Act I, Scene 4

what I should ascribe as the reason for Mary's entrance here, and particularly for her ignominious gracing of Courtenay's heels as that gentleman leaves the stage. She could not have entered to eavesdrop because, in the first place, the more advantageous position to eavesdrop is outside a room not inside and, in the second place, she does not seem to be aware of the occupants of the room until after she has entered. Once in, why out again after one aside? Surely the audience's first view of the principal character should be a more definite and more dignified one than this. It can not even serve as a finger-post, an index to the queen's real character, and hence the episode has no excuse for existing.

In Scene V the audience gets a second view of Mary. Now we see her lavishing kisses upon a miniature of Philip of Spain and asking her little maid to corroborate her extravagant epithets. Later in the play the maid Alice puts into words her feeling toward Mary for this effusive, over demonstrative attachment:

". . . . . Ay, this Philip;
I used to love the Queen with all my heart --
God help me, but methinks I love her less
For such a dotage upon such a man." (1)

Mary's bitter passion for Philip is one of the chief factors contributing to her ultimate tragedy; and yet the

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Queen Mary , Act I, Scene 5

actual time accorded to him on the stage is insignificant. It is a wonder that Sir Henry Irving found the part worthy of his histrionic talent. We see Philip for the first time in Act III, Scene I, as he crosses the stage with Mary in the marriage procession, but the dialogue interest is taken by the citizens who watch the procession. In "Julius Caesar," our first view of the mighty Roman is in a procession, but Shakespeare makes Caesar command the attention of every eye and ear in the house as he passes across the stage. Our second view of Philip is in Act III, Scene II, when he makes an entrance with Cardinal Pole. We naturally expect that Mary and Philip will command this scene, and that, through their dialogue, we will get an adumbration of the tragedy inevitable from this unhappy union. To our surprise, however, Cardinal Pole carries the scene. Sixty-four lines are recited before Philip opens his mouth, and then he merely speaks to compliment the churchman: "Well said, Lord Legate." There is nothing of the cold, cruel, and sensual Spaniard in this feeble character. Pole, Mary, and Philip discuss England's return to the fold, Cramner's heresy, and the Cardinal's retirement to Lambeth. Philip and Pole leave and Mary turns to the audience and tells them the startling news that she expects an heir to the English throne. Her lyrical cry is excellent in itself but distinctly in the wrong setting here. We have not

been prepared for it; we are not in the proper mood to receive such news; we cannot make the emotional adjustment that we are called upon to make at this moment to mount to her high plane of tension. Upon the echo of her

"My star, my son!"

Philip enters again with the Duke of Alva and Mary says:

" "O, Philip, come with me!
Good news have I to tell you, news to make
Both of us happy -- ay, the kingdom too.
Nay, come with me -- one moment!" (1)

Philip evidently ignores Mary because when he speaks the stage direction reads "Philip to Alva ." After he has finished discussing William the Silent with the Duke of Alva, he turns to Mary with the words: "Well, Madam, this new happiness of mine?" Presumably the Queen of England has been standing patiently on the stage all this while waiting until her husband felt like bestowing his attention upon her. As Mary, Philip, and Alva exit, three pages immediately enter and discuss the prospective heir. It strikes one as odd that the pages should be informed before the King of Spain, himself.

The character of Mary is not conceived in tragedy. She is not drawn for us as an eminently noble nature brought low through some baneful error of human frailty.

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Queen Mary ; Act III, Scene 2

At most, she is a poor, weak, doting creature from the outset, embittered by an unrequited love, cursed with a bigot's frenzy for persecution, and thwarted in her longing to bear a Spanish heir to the English succession. She hates the English blood of her father that flows through her veins; she feels herself an alien among these people who sanctioned the divorce of her Spanish mother. Just once she seems to flash forth, if not an eminently noble nature, at least an eminently courageous one. In the following scene she shows herself for a brief space every inch a queen:

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER. Wyatt, your Grace, hath broken
thro' the guards
And gone to Ludgate.
GARDINER. Madam, I much fear
That all is lost; but we can save your Grace.
The river still is free. I do beseech you,
There yet is time, take boat and pass to Windsor.
MARY. I pass to Windsor and I lose my crown.
GARDINER. Pass, then, I pray your Highness,
to the Tower.
MARY. I shall but be their prisoner in
the Tower.
CRIES WITHOUT. The traitor! treason! Pembroke!
LADIES. Treason! Treason!
MARY. Peace.
False to Northumberland, is he false to me?
Bear witness, Renard, that I live and die
The true and faithful bride of Philip -- [A sound
of feet and voices thickening hither -- blows --]
Hark, there is battle at the palace gates,
And I will out upon the gallery.
LADIES. No, no your Grace; see there the
arrows flying.
MARY. I am Harry's daughter, Tudor, and
not Fear.
[Goes out on the gallery.]

The guards are all driven in, skulk into corners
Like rabbits to their holes. A gracious guard
Truly; shame on them! they have shut the gates!

[Enter SIR ROBERT SOUTHWELL.]

SOUTHWELL. The porter, please your Grace, hath shut the gates
On friend and foe. Your gentlemen-at-arms,
If this be not your Grace's order, cry
To have the gates set wide again, and they
With their good battle-axes will do you right
Against all traitors.

MARY. They are the flower of England, set the gates wide.

[Exit Southwell.]

[Enter COURTENAY.]

COURTENAY. All lost, all lost, all yielded! A barge, a barge!
The Queen must to the Tower.

MARY. Whence come you, sir?

COURTENAY. From Charing Cross; the rebels broke us there,
And I sped hither with what haste I might
To save my royal cousin.

MARY. Where is Pembroke?

COURTENAY. I left him somewhere in the thick of it.

MARY. Left him and fled; and thou that wouldst be King,
And hast not heart nor honor! I myself
Will down into the battle and there bide
The upshot of my quarrel, or die with those
That are no cowards and no Courtenays.

COURTENAY. I do not love your Grace should call me coward.

[Enter another MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER. Over, your Grace, all crush'd; the brave Lord William
Thrust him from Ludgate, and the traitor flying
To Temple Bar, there by Sir Maurice Berkeley
Was taken prisoner.

MARY. To the Tower with <u>him</u>!

MESSENGER. 'Tis said he told Sir Maurice there was one
Cognizant of this, and party thereunto,
My Lord of Devon.

MARY. To the T ower with him!
COURTENAY. O la, the Tower, the Tower, always
the Tower
I shall grow into it -- I shall be the Tower.
MARY. Your lordship may not have so long to wait.
Remove him!
COURTENAY. La, to whistle out my life,
And carve my coat of arms upon the walls again!
Exit Courtenay, guarded.
MESSENGER. Also this Wyatt did confess the Princess
Cognizant thereof, and party thereunto.
MARY. What? Whom -- whom did you say?
MESSENGER. Elizabeth.
Your royal sister.
MARY. To the Tower with her!
My foes are at my feet, and I am Queen.
Gardiner and her Ladies kneel to her.
GARDINER. rising There let them lie, your footstool!
(Aside) Can I strike Elizabeth? -- not now, and save
the life
Of Devon. If I save him, he and his
Are bound to me -- may strike hereafter.
(Aloud) Madam
What Wyatt said, or what they said he said,
Cries of the moment and the street --
MARY. He said it.
GARDINER. Your courts of justice will determine that.
RENARD. [advancing] I trust by this your Highness
will allow
Some spice of wisdom in my telling you,
When last we talk'd, that Philip would not come
Till Guildford Dudley and the Duke of Suffolk
And Lady Jane had left us.
MARY. They shall die.
RENARD. And your so loving sister,
MARY. She shall die.
My foes are at my feet, and Philip King.
[Exeunt.] (1)

Mary's near-approaching death gives the lyric poet rather than the playwright a chance to humanize the character, and we have, if only for a moment, a real flesh and blood woman at last. The pathetic little song which falters from

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Queen Mary ; Act II, Scene 4

the lips of the dying queen is one of Tennyson's most beautiful lyrics, and placed here in the play it is poignantly affecting.

MARY. I am a byword. Heretic and rebel
Point at me and make merry. Philip gone too!
And Calais gone! Time that I were gone too!
LADY CLARENCE. Nay, if the fetid gutter had a voice
And cried I was not clean, what should I care,
Or you, for heretic cries? And I believe,
Spite of your melancholy Sir Nicholas,
Your England is as loyal as myself.
MARY. [seeing the paper dropt by Pole.] There! There! another paper! Said you not
Many of these were loyal? Shall I try
If this be one of such?
LADY CLARENCE. Let it be, let it be.
God pardon me! I have never yet found one.
MARY. [reads.] 'Your people hate you as your husband hates you.'
Clarence, Clarence, what have I done? what sin
Beyond all grace, all pardon? Mother of God,
Thou knowest never woman meant so well,
And fared so ill in this disastrous world.
My people hate me and desire my death.
LADY CLARENCE. No, madam, no.
MARY. My husband hates me, and desires my death.
LADY CLARENCE. No, madam; these are libels.
MARY. I hate myself, and I desire my death.
LADY CLARENCE. Long live your Majesty! Shall Alice sing you
One of her pleasant songs? Alice, my child,
Bring us your lute. [Alice goes.] They say the gloom of Saul
Was lighten'd by young David's harp.
MARY. Too young!
And never knew a Philip.

[Re-enter Alice.]

Give <u>me</u> the lute.
He hates me!

[She sings.]

Hapless doom of woman happy in betrothing!
Beauty passes like a breath, and love is lost in loathing.
Low, my lute; speak low, my lute, but say the world is
nothing --
Low, lute, low!
Love will hover round the flowers when they first awaken;
Love will fly the fallen leaf, and not be overtaken.
Low my lute! Oh low, my lute! we fade and are forsaken --
Low, dear lute, low!

Take it away! not low enough for me!
ALICE. Your Grace hath a low voice.
MARY. How dare you say it?
Even for that he hates me. A low voice
Lost in a wilderness where none can hear!
A voice of shipwreck on a shoreless sea!
A low voice from the dust and from the grave!
[Sitting on the ground.] There, am I low enough now?
ALICE. Good Lord! how grim and ghastly looks
her Grace,
With both her knees drawn upward to her chin,
There was an old-world tomb beside my father's,
And this was open'd, and the dead were found
Sitting, and in this fashion; she looks a corpse. (1)

Tennyson failed, as a dramatist, to use the possibilities inherent in the character of Mary Tudor. What a woman Shakespeare could have created for the stage! Certainly one that would have contained the tragic "Hamartia" insisted upon by Aristotle. Shakespeare probably would have made Mary a strong-willed Tudor cursed with an overmastering and all-consuming love for a nature inferior and hostile to her own best interests and to those of her race. Then he would have us watch this degrading passion for the wily Spaniard accomplish her ruin. Step by step it would vitiate the springs of her being until every

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Queen Mary, Act V, Scene 2

act would be baneful and bring down upon her head the ruin of herself and of her regime. First, Mary would seek to inflame Philip's coldness by laying her kingdom as a pawn in his hands; next, she would seek favor by adopting the methods of his diabolical inquisition to crush the heresy they both despised; and most deadly of all, she would yield her national resources to aid him in his continental conquests. So, step by step, her barren passion for this husband to whom she grows ever more repugnant would lead her on to the inevitable ruin of the dénouement. So, too, every episode of the play would contribute to the cumulative tragedy, the overwhelming realization of her blighted womanhood, her estranged kingdom, and her lost name in the hearts of her people.

No such heart-rending dénouement, however, ends this play in the hands of Tennyson. No great "catharsis" is here, accomplished through our terror for the sins and our pity for the sinner! Surely the passions to be dealt with cry aloud for a powerful personality to embody them. The Tudor blood arrogantly demanding absolute and unquestioning submission, the fiery Spanish abandonment in a religious cause, the barren woman's passionate longing for a child, the forsaken wife's pitiful eagerness to win

the love she longs for, the queen's craving for a people's confidence and love -- all these desires, cravings, thwarted hopes, inhibitions should have given a depth and power to Mary's character that would have made her a dramatic sister of Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth. This would have been an imaginative Mary Tudor, it is true, but the enduring characters in drama are not transcriptions from, nor photographic copies of, actual individuals. Rather do they transcend in capacity, action, and utterance the human beings of history whose names they bear even while they conform in the main to the lives which they led while they were in the flesh. We acknowledge the reality of Oedipus, Mark Anthony, and Julius Caesar even though we feel that they surpass their historical counterparts. Tennyson's Mary does not manifest this superiority.

One of the rare lyrical and human touches that Tennyson did put into this play is Mary's cry:

"He hath awaked! he hath awaked!
He stirs within the darkness!
O Philip, husband! now thy love to mine
Will cling more close, and those bleak manners thaw,
That make me shamed and tongue-tied in my love.
The second Prince of Peace --
The great unborn defender of the Faith,
Who will avenge me of mine enemies --
He comes, and my star rises.
The stormy Wyatts and Northumberlands,
The proud ambitions of Elizabeth
And all her fieriest partisans -- are pale,
Before my star!
The light of this new learning wanes and dies;
The ghosts of Luther and Zwinglius fade
Into the deathless hell which is their doom

Before my star!
His sceptre shall go forth from Ind to Ind!
His sword shall hew the heretic peoples down!
His faith shall clothe the world that will be his,
Like universal air and sunshine! Open,
Ye everlasting gates! The King is here! --
My star, my son! " (1)

The didactic purpose of the author is so strong in this play that it is practically a thesis drama. Tennyson's Protestantism was militant, and his hatred of Rome a passion. The strength of his emotion overcame that sense of exquisite balance and proportion which the great dramatist must have instinctively. The minute that a playwright becomes a partisan in a political or religious conflict, he ceases to be an artist and becomes merely a poetical mouthpiece or broadcaster.

We think of art as a careful selection of the significant and the representative. But Tennyson seems to have ignored any such artistic mandate. He literally crams every issue of the period into his story, and does not seem to know himself just what was dominant and what was subordinate. The religious conflict is really the main plot but he includes also the Spanish marriage, the effect of an Anglo-Spanish alliance upon the balance of power in Europe, the Wyatt rebellion, constant internal and domestic strife, Pole's personal conflict with the Pope, the struggle of Gardiner and Pole over the efficacy of persecution, Cramner's recantation, Elizabeth's struggle to keep her head amidst

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(1) Tennyson: Queen Mary; Act III, Scene 2

the intrigue that swirled about her, and on we might go. The mass of material that he has accumulated is too vast for a unified effect to be made upon the audience. The unfamiliar media res loses its elasticity and pliability in the hands of a novice. We have a succession of episodes strung loosely together rather than that effective sense of inevitability which the well-written tragedy should embody.

Tennyson seems to have lost sight of the fact that an audience is in the theater first and foremost for the purpose of enjoyment. A chronicle play sits heavily upon the modern dramatic stomach. Some critics argue that Shakespeare used the chronicle play, evidently confident of its dramatic possibilities, and that, therefore, it should be a vigorous dramatic type today. One critic explains very plausibly the great popularity of the chronicle play in the sixteenth century:

> "In Shakespeare's day the stage provided the public not merely with artistic excitement but also with instruction. It was an age of few books, and there is no doubt that many a man went to see 'Henry VI' because he wanted to know something of his country's history. Books of history were not many, and they were dull, while historical romance was not yet dreamed of. Shakespeare's chronicle plays have vanished from the boards with the exception of two. In 'Richard III' the extraordinary dramatic possibilities of the subject and the extraordinary vigor with which they were developed have triumphed over the inherent defects of the form, and 'Henry IV' is kept alive for the sake of the greatest of all comic characters." (1)

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(1) Gwynn, Stephen: Tennyson: A Critical Study

I heartily disagree with the opinion of William Archer concerning "Queen Mary" which I have already quoted: "I will confess that -- apart from Mr. Hardy's 'Dynasts' a magnificent epic rather than a drama -- Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' seems to me, of all the Elizabethanizing products, that which has most of the breath of life in it." The more often I read the play, the less I see anything commendable in it. I cannot imagine its evoking any great emotional response from any audience whatever. To me it is a colossal failure. We miss that "catharsis" which as George Bernard Shaw puts it: "is produced by a great dramatist's revelation of ourselves to our own consciousness."

To the monotony inherent in the subject matter of the play, Tennyson adds a monotony in tempo. Every technician eliminates unessentials, but Tennyson introduces long speeches without momentum, inducing somber boredom. A good example of a deplorable halt in the action is Mary's speech in the second act. No one skilled in the technique of the drama would have allowed Mary to walk on the stage, declaim seventy-nine lines of blank verse, be answered by twenty-eight more, broken by a single "acclamation" from the patient Anglo-Saxon mob, and then exit!

Enter Guards, Mary, and Gardiner. Sir Thomas White leads her to a raised seat on the dais.

WHITE. I, the Lord Mayor, and these our companies
And guilds of London, gathered here, beseech
Your Highness to accept our lowliest thanks
For your most princely presence; and we pray
That we, your true and loyal citizens,
From your own lips, at once may know
The wherefore of this coming, and so learn
Your royal will, and do it. -- I, Lord Mayor
Of London, and our guilds and companies.

MARY. In mine own person am I come to you,
To tell you what indeed ye see and know,
How traitorously these rebels out of Kent
Have made strong head against ourselves and you.
They would not have me wed the Prince of Spain;
That was their pretext -- so they spake at first --
But we sent divers of our Council to them,
And by their answers to the question ask'd,
It doth appear this marriage is the least
Of all their quarrel.
They have betrayed the treason of their hearts:
Seek to possess our person, hold our Tower,
Place and displace our councillors, and use
Both us and them according as they will.
Now what I am ye know right well -- your Queen;
To whom, when I was wedded to the realm
And the realm's laws (the spousal ring whereof,
Not ever to be laid aside, I wear
Upon this finger), ye did promise full
Allegiance and obedience to the death.
Ye know my father was the rightful heir
Of England, and his right came down to me,
Corroborate by your acts of Parliament:
And as ye were most loving unto him,
So doubtless will ye show yourselves to me.
Wherefore, ye will not brook that anyone
Should seize our person, occupy our state,
More specially a traitor so presumptous
As this same Wyatt, who hath tamper'd with
A public ignorance, and, under color
Of such a cause as hath no color, seeks
To bend the laws to his own will, and yield
Full scope to persons rascal and forlorn,
To make free spoil and havock of your goods.
Now as your Prince, I say,
I, that was never mother, cannot tell

How mothers love their children; yet methinks,
A prince as naturally may love his people
As these their children; and be sure your queen
So loves you, and so loving, needs must deem
This love by you return'd as heartily;
And thro' this common knot and bond of love,
Doubt not they will be speedily overthrown.
As to this marriage, ye shall understand
We made thereto no treaty of ourselves,
And set no foot theretoward unadvised
Of all our Privy Council; furthermore,
This marriage had the assent of those to whom
The king, my father, did commit his trust:
Who not alone esteem'd it honorable,
But for the wealth and glory of our realm,
And all our loving subjects, most expedient.
As to myself,
I am not so set on wedlock as to choose
But where I list, nor yet so amorous
That I must needs be husbanded; I thank God,
I have lived a virgin, and I noway doubt
But that with God's grace, I can live so still.
Yet if it might please God that I should leave
Some fruit of mine own body after me
To be your king, ye would rejoice thereat,
And it would be your comfort, as I trust;
And truly, if I either thought or knew
This marriage should bring loss or danger to you,
My subjects, or impair in any way
This royal state of England, I would never
Consent thereto, nor marry while I live:
Moreover, if this marriage should not seem,
Before our own High Court of Parliament,
To be of rich advantage to our realm,
We will refrain, and not alone from this,
Likewise from any other, out of which
Looms the least chance of peril to our realm.
Wherefore be bold, and with your lawful Prince
Stand fast against our enemies and yours,
And fear them not. I fear them not. My Lord,
I leave Lord William Howard in your city,
To guard and keep you whole and safe from all
The spoil and sackage aim'd at by these rebels,
Who mouth and foam against the Prince of Spain.

VOICES. Long live Queen Mary!
Down with Wyatt!
The Queen!

WHITE. Three voices from our guilds and companies!
You are shy and proud like Englishmen, my masters,
And will not trust your voices. Understand:
Your lawful Prince hath come to cast herself
On loyal hearts and bosoms, hoped to fall
Into the wide-spread arms of fealty,
And finds you statues. Speak at once -- and all!
For whom?
Our sovereign Lady by King Harry's will;
The Queen of England -- or the Kentish Squire?
I know you loyal. Speak! in the name of God!
The Queen of England or the rabble of Kent?
The reeking dungfork master of the mace!
Your havings wasted by the scythe and spade --
Your rights and charters hobnail'd into slush --
Your houses fired -- your gutters bubbling blood --
ACCLAMATION. No! No! The Queen! the Queen!
WHITE. Your Highness hears
This burst and bass of loyal harmony,
And how we each and all of us abhor
The venomous, bestial, devilish revolt
Of Thomas Wyatt. Hear us now make oath
To raise your Highness thirty thousand men,
And arm and strike as with one hand, and brush
This Wyatt from our shoulders, like a flea
That might have leapt upon us unawares.
Swear with me, noble fellow-citizens, all,
With all your trades, and guilds, and companies.
CITIZENS. We swear!
MARY. We thank your Lordship and your loyal city.
[Exit Mary attended.] " (1)

Shakespeare frequently has long speeches, but how subtly he makes them reveal the personality that utters them! Notice how delicately Claudius's address to the Danish court in Act I, Scene II, of "Hamlet" reveals the hypocrisy of this false fratricide. We have here, to be sure, thirty-nine lines from Claudius before there is an interruption, but, instead of being bored, the audience sits rapt, breathlessly listening to the unctuous soul

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(1) Tennyson: Queen Mary, Act III, Scene II

and shrewd, scheming brain betray their guilt. We note the formal lines of blank verse when he is mentioning his brother's death and his marriage with "our sometime sister, now our queen." He is not sure of his audience here; therefore he has to weigh heavily each phrase before he utters it. Notice the regular stresses and the end-stopped lines of blank verse:

" CLAUDIUS. Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature,
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th' imperial jointress of this warlike state.
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy, --
With one auspicious and one dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage
In equal scale weighing delight and dole, --
Taken to wife; nor have we herein barr'd
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along. For all, our thanks,(1)

However, once he is over these quicksands, Claudius stands on firmer ground in the discussion of matters pertaining to the state, and swings into run-on lines that speak a freer soul, a mind relieved. Notice how much more delicately the stresses fall in the passage that follows, as well as the more rapid movement which the enjambement lends to the lines:

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(1) Shakespeare, William: Hamlet ; Act I, Scene 2

"Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Colleagued with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message,
Importing the surrender of those lands,
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.
Now for ourself and for this time of meeting.
Thus much the business is: we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, --
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose, -- to suppress
His further gait herein; in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions, are all made
Out of his subject; and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway;
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king, more than the scope
Of these dilated articles allow.
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty."(1)

Tennyson was not sufficiently a man of the theater to include with an infallible touch only the theatrically effective both in stage business and in dialogue. He failed to get that due proportionment of incident, situation, and dialogue which makes for dispatch in the working out of the drama. He failed to get the symmetrical relation of the parts to the whole, of details to the general effect. Somehow or other the drama's best seems to have slipped by Tennyson in this play, and his best is just commonplace stuff.

In spite of the plaudits of the intellegentsia, "Queen Mary" was never a popular play. The dramatic

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(1) Shakespeare, William: Hamlet; Act I, Scene 2

critic of the "London Times" on June 19, 1875, wrote a remarkable review of the play, giving it high praise.

The well-known French dramatic critic Monsieur Augustin Filon wrote in "Le Théâtre Contemporain" (1895):

"Vienne une main pieuse qui degage ces deux drames ('Queen Mary' and 'Harold'), fasse circuler L'air et la lumiere autour de leurs lignes essentielles; vienne un grand acteur qui compresse et incarne Harold, une grande actrice qui se passione pour le caractere de Marie, et, sans effort, Tennyson prendra sa place parmi les dramaturges." (1)

That the literary intelligentsia of Tennyson's day thought well of "Queen Mary" is plainly to be seen by the many congratulatory letters which his son includes in his "Memoir." Here is one from the historian Froude, praising the didactic note which, to most lovers of the drama, constitutes one of the play's theatrical defects.

"My dear Tennyson, I cannot trust myself to say how greatly I admire the play. Beyond the immediate effect, you'll have hit a more fatal blow than a thousand pamphleteers and controversialists; besides this you have reclaimed one more section of English History from the wilderness and given it a form in which it will be fixed forever. No one since Shakespeare has done that. When we were beginning to think that we were to have no more from you, you have given us the greatest of all your works. Once more I think you for having written this book with all my heart. J. A. Froude." (2)

Of all the letters quoted in the "Memoir" only Browning's mentions the staged drama -- all the others were written of the poem.

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(1) Tennyson: Memoir; page 178
(2) Ibid.; pages 181-182

"My dear Tennyson, I want to be among the earliest who assure you of the complete success of your 'Queen Mary' last night. I have more than once seen a more satisfactory performance of it, to be sure, in what Carlyle calls 'the Private Theater under my own hat,' because there and then not a line nor a word was left out; nay, there were abundant 'encores' of half the speeches: still whatever was left by the stage scissors suggested what a quantity of 'cuttings'would furnish one with an after-feast.

"Irving was very good indeed, and the others did their best, nor so badly.

"The love as well as admiration for the author was conspicuous, indeed, I don't know whether you ought to have been present to enjoy it, or were not safer in absence from a smothering of flowers and deafening 'tumult of acclaim,' but Hallam was there to report, and Mrs. Tennyson is with you to believe. All congratulations to you both from

Yours affectionately ever,
Robert Browning."
(April 19, 1876) (1)

HAROLD

The play "Harold" was the second in Tennyson's great historical trilogy. It was never acted during the author's lifetime, but was put on much later, on April 2, 1928, at the Court Theater. No success is recorded. In my opinion "Harold" is a much better play than "Queen Mary." It is far less complex in plot, far more successful in the characterizations of its leading characters, far more sustained in its tone, far better knit together, and far more successful in its totality of effect. And still it stands

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son ; page 185

an infinite distance from the successful, theatrically effective play. Tennyson dedicated the play to Lord Lytton to obliterate the memory of the old "literary passage-of-arms" which he had held with his father, the celebrated creator of the stage character of Richelieu. The dedication reads:

"To His Excellence
THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYTTON
Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

"My dear Lord Lytton, -- After old-world records -- such as the Bayeux tapestry and the Roman de Rou -- Edward Freeman's History of the Norman Conquest, and your father's Historical Romance treating of the same times, have been mainly helpful to me in writing this Drama. Your father dedicated his 'Harold' to my father's brother; allow me to dedicate my 'Harold' to yourself.

A. Tennyson." (1)

Lord Lytton acknowledged the signal honor paid to him in the following letter sent to the poet from India:

"Dear Mr. Tennyson,

"I am told by the English newspapers, received today, that you have dedicated to me your new dramatic poem 'Harold.' I have not yet seen the poem; but there must be an exception to every rule, and assuming that in this instance at least the newspapers tell the truth, I cannot let a mail go by without asking you to believe how flattered I am by the honour you have done me, and how sensibly touched by your manner of doing it. Memories the tenderest and most cherished of my life are strangely mingled with the hope your generosity has sanctioned, that I may live hereafter on your pages, associated with the name of their great author, to whom in common with all our countrymen, I already owe so much, and with that of my dear father, to whom I owe life itself, and all great things in life, nor least of all my share in the valued tribute so generously offered to his memory by England's greatest living Poet.

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son; page 216

In his name and for his sake, I think you no less warmly than on my own behalf. It is a fact of which I was not aware until after his death, that the plot of almost every every one of my father's novels was first worked out in the form of a play; and probably he owed to the habitual employment of this method much of his success as a romance writer in the dramatic development of character and situation. In the mass of his unpublished manuscripts I have found an unfinished dramatic sketch entitled 'William the Norman' or 'William the Conqueror' (I forget which), containing the undoubted germ of the historical romance to which reference is made in the dedication of your own poem. This manuscript is not with me in India; but, should I live to return to England, I hope you will then accept from me a private copy of it, as a literary curiosity which will henceforth derive its chief interest from your own work. Meanwhile pray accept the sincere assurance of those grateful sentiments with which I am,

Dear Mr. Tennyson, your obliged
LYTTON."
(19th Jan., 1877) (1)

In 'Harold' we have portrayed the great struggle which took place between the Saxon and the Norman for the supremacy in England. Harold, Earl of Wessex, commands the respect of King, court, and people for his wisdom in the council, for his intrepid courage and bravery in battle, and for his love of harmony and brotherhood in peace. The flaming meteor in the sky which most men behold, panic stricken, as a portent of catastrophe for England, he sees, with a sane common sense, merely as a natural phenomenon:

"STIGAND [pointing to the comet.] War there, my son?
is that the doom of England?
HAROLD. Why not the doom of all the world as well?
For all the world sees it as well as England.
These meteors came and went before our day.
Not harming any; it threatens us no more

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son ; pages 216-217

Than French or Norman. War? the worst that follows
Things that seem jerk'd out of the common rut
Of Nature is the hot religious fool,
Who, seeing war in heaven, for heaven's credit
Makes it on earth -- " (1)

Old Edward the Confessor, feeling death near, creeps into a religious selfishness, half-compounded of fear and superstition, and looks about him for an heir. Although he loves Tostig, the second son of Godwin best, he names Harold his heir when death shall overtake him. To Harold he says:

". . . . . thou
Hast broken all my foes, lighten'd for me
The weight of this poor crown, and left me time
And peace for prayer to gain a better one.
Twelve years of service! England loves thee for it.
Thou art the man to rule her!" (2)

Harold asks the king's consent to hunt in Flanders. The king with all the fervor of one whose life is governed by superstition begs him not to go: "Go not to Normandy -- go not to Normandy!" But Harold, the peace-lover, the conciliator, insists upon going, despite the fact that the king draws but "a faint foot," despite the fact that he leaves the woman he loves against her better judgment:

"EDITH. . . . Must thou go?
HAROLD. Not must, but will. It is but for one moon.
EDITH. Leaving so many foes in Edward's hall
To league against thy weal. The Lady Aldwyth
Was here to-day, and when she touch'd on thee
She stammer'd in her hate; I am sure she hates thee,
Pants for thy blood.

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Harold; Act I, Scene 1
(2) Ibid.

"HAROLD. Well, I have given her cause --
I fear no woman.
EDITH. Hate not one who felt
Some pity for thy hater! I am sure
Her morning wanted sunlight, she so praised
The convent and lone life -- within the pale --
Beyond the passion. Nay -- she held with Edward
At least methought she held with holy Edward,
That marriage was half sin.
HAROLD. A lesson worth
Finger and thumb -- thus (snaps his fingers)
And my answer to it --
See here -- an interwoven H and E!
Take thou this ring; I will demand his ward
From Edward when I come again. Ay, would she?
She to shut up my blossom in the dark!
Thou art my nun, thy cloister in mine arms.
EDITH [taking the ring.] Yea, but Earl Tostig --
HAROLD. That's a truer fear!
For if the North take fire, I should be back;
I shall be, soon enough.
EDITH. Ay, but last night
An evil dream that ever came and went --
HAROLD. A gnat that vext thy pillow! Had I been by,
I would have spoil'd his horn. My girl, what was it?
EDITH. O that thou wert not going!
For so methought it was our marriage-morn,
And while we stood together, a dead man
Rose from behind the altar, tore away
My marriage ring, and rent my bridal veil;
And then I turn'd, and saw the church all fill'd
With dead men upright from their graves, and all
The dead men made at thee to murder thee,
But thou didst back thyself against a pillar
And strike among them with thy battle-axe --
There, what a dream!
HAROLD. Well, well -- a dream -- no more!
EDITH. Did not Heaven speak to men in dreams of old?
HAROLD. Ay, -- well -- of old. I tell thee what,
my child;
Thou hast misread this merry dream of thine,
Taken the rifted pillars of the wood
For smooth stone columns of the sanctuary,
The shadows of a hundred fat deer
For dead men's ghosts. True, that the battle-axe
Was out of place; it should have been the bow.
Come, thou shalt dream no more such dreams; I swear it,
By mine own eyes -- and these two sapphires -- these
Twin rubies, that are amulets against all

The kisses of all kind of womankind
In Flanders, till the sea shall roll me back
To tumble at thy feet.
EDITH. That would but shame me,
Rather than make me vain. The sea may roll
Sand, shingle, shore-weed, not the living rock
Which guards the land.
HAROLD. Except it be a soft one,
And under-eaten to the fall. Mine amulet --
This last -- upon thine eyelids, to shut in
A happier dream. Sleep, sleep, and thou shalt see
My greyhounds fleeting like a beam of light,
And hear my peregrine and her bells in heaven;
And other bells on earth, which yet are heaven's;
Guess what they be.
EDITH. He cannot guess who knows.
Farewell, my king.
HAROLD. Not yet, but then -- my queen. [Exeunt.] (1)

So against dreams, portents, and pleadings, Harold sails for the continent and is wrecked off the coast of Ponthieu. Guy, Count of Ponthieu, delivers him into the hands of William of Normandy, who sees in the capture of the Saxon Harold a splendid opportunity to further his plans for the conquest of England. William claims the throne through the preferment of Edward.

WILLIAM. When he was here in Normandy,
He loved us and we him, because we found him
A Norman of the Normans.
HAROLD. So did we.
WILLIAM. A gentle, gracious, pure and saintly man!
And grateful to the hand that shielded him,
He promised that if ever he were king
In England, he would give his kingly voice
To me as his successor. Knowest thou this?
HAROLD. I learn it now.
WILLIAM. Thou knowest I am his cousin,
And that my wife descends from Alfred?
HAROLD. Ay,

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Harold; Act I, Scene 2

WILLIAM. Who hath a better claim then to the crown?
So that ye will not crown the Atheling?
HAROLD. None that I know -- if that but hung upon King Edward's will." (1)

But English Harold believes that the King of England has not sole voice in this; the Witan must consent and confirm the king's choice. As Stigand says:

"Why, then, the throne is empty. Who inherits?
For tho' we be not bound by the king's voice
In making of a king, yet the king's voice
Is much toward his making. Who inherits?"

William parades his horrible brutality and ruthless cruelty before Harold, showing him the hideous fate in store for one who balks his royal will. Harold fears not for himself but for his younger brother Wulfnoth, a hostage at the Norman court, who pleads with him to placate William until they both be safe in England:

HAROLD. Poor brother! still a hostage!
WULFNOTH. Yea, and I
Shall see the dewy kiss of dawn no more
Make blush the maiden-white of our tall cliffs,
Nor mark the sea-bird rouse himself and hover
Above the windy ripple, and fill the sky
With free sea-laughter -- never -- save indeed
Thou canst make yield this iron-mooded duke
To let me go.
HAROLD. Why brother, so he will;
But on conditions. Canst thou guess at them?
WULFNOTH. Draw nearer, -- I was in the corridor,
I saw him coming with his brother Odo
The Bayeux bishop, and I hid myself.
HAROLD. They did thee wrong who made thee hostage; thou
Wast ever fearful
WULFNOTH. And he spoke -- I heard him --
'This Harold is not of the royal blood,
Can have no right to the crown;' and Odo said,
'Thine is the right, for thine the might; he is here,
And yonder is thy keep.'

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(1) Tennyson: Harold; Act I[I], Scene 2

HAROLD. No, Wulfnoth, no!
WULFNOTH. And William laugh'd and swore that might was right
Far as he knew in this poor world of ours --
'Marry, the Saints must go along with us,
And brother, we will find a way,' said he --
Yea, yea, he would be King of England.
HAROLD. Never!
WULFNOTH. Yea, but thou must not this way answer him.
HAROLD. Is it not better still to speak the truth?
WULFNOTH. Not here, or thou wilt never hence nor I;
For in the racing toward this golden goal
He turns not right or left, but tramples flat
Whatever thwarts him; hast thou never heard
His savagery at Alencon, -- the town
Hung out raw hides along their walls, and cried,
'Work for the tanner.'
HAROLD. That had anger'd me
Had I been William.
WULFNOTH. Nay, but he had prisoners,
He tore their tongues out, sliced their hands away,
And flung them streaming o'er the battlements
Upon the heads of those who walk'd within --
O, speak him fair, Harold, for thine own sake!
HAROLD. Your Welshman says, 'The Truth against the World,'
Much more the truth against myself.
WULFNOTH. Thyself?
But for my sake, O brother! O, for my sake!
HAROLD. Poor Wulfnoth! do they not entreat thee well?
WULFNOTH. I see the blackness of my dungeon loom
Across their lamps of revel, and beyond
The merriest murmurs of their banquet clank
The shackles that will bind me to the wall.
HAROLD. Too fearful still.
WULFNOTH. O, no, no -- speak him fair!
Call it to temporize, and not to lie;
Harold, I do not counsel thee to lie.
The man that hath to foil a murderous aim
May, surely, play with words.
HAROLD. Words are the man.
Not even for thy sake, brother, would I lie.
WULFNOTH. Then for thine Edith?
HAROLD. There thou prick'st me deep.
WULFNOTH. And for our Mother England?
HAROLD. Deeper still.

WULFNOTH. And deeper still the deep-down oubliette,
Down thirty feet below the smiling day --
In blackness -- dogs' food thrown upon thy head.
And over thee the suns arise and set,
And the lark sings, the sweet stars come and go,
And men are at their markets, in their fields,
And woo their loves and have forgotten thee;
And thou art upright in thy living grave,
Where there is barely room to shift thy side,
And all thine England hath forgotten thee;
And he our lazy-pious Norman King,
With all his Normans round him once again,
Counts his old beads, and hath forgotten thee.
HAROLD. Thou art of my blood, and so methinks, my boy,
Thy fears infect me beyond reason. Peace!
WULFNOTH. And then our fiery Tostig, while thy hands
Are palsied here, if his Northumbrians rise
And hurl him from them, -- I have heard the Normans
Count upon this confusion -- may he not make
A league with William, so to bring him back?
HAROLD. That lies within the shadow of the chance.
WULFNOTH. And like a river in flood thro' a burst dam
Descends the ruthless Norman -- our good King
Kneels mumbling some old bone -- our helpless folk
Are wash'd away, wailing, in their own blood --
HAROLD. Wailing! not warring? Boy, thou hast forgotten
That thou art English.
WULFNOTH. Then our modest women --
I know the Norman license -- thine own Edith --
HAROLD. No more! I will not hear thee -- William comes. (1)

With mental reservations most clear to himself, Harold at last consents to help William to the crown of England. Shrewd William, under pretext of wishing his Norman barons to hear Harold pledge assistance under oath, asks him to swear with his hand upon a "golden pall."

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Harold; Act II, Scene 2

WILLIAM. We have heard
Of thy just, mild, and equal governance;
Honor to thee! Thou art perfect in all honor
Thy naked word thy bond! confirm it now
Before our gather'd Norman baronage,
For they will not believe thee -- as I believe.

[Descends from his throne and stands by the ark.]

Let all men here bear witness of our bond!

[Beckons to Harold, who advances.]

Lay thou thy hand upon this golden pall!
Behold the jewel of Saint Pancratius
Woven into the gold. Swear thou on this!

[After Harold has sworn the oath, the false William cries:]

Show him by whom he hath sworn.

[The two Bishops advance, and raise the cloth of gold. The bodies and bones of Saints are seen lying in the ark.]

The holy bones of all the canonized
From all the holiest shrines in Normandy!
HAROLD. Horrible!

[They let the cloth fall again.]

WILLIAM. Ay, for thou hast sworn an oath
Which, if not kept, would make the hard earth rive
To the very devil's horns, the bright sky cleave
To the very feet of God, and send her hosts
Of injured Saints to scatter sparks of plague
Thro' all your cities, blast your infants, dash
The torch of war, among your standing corn,
Dabble your hearths with your own blood. (1)

So Harold returns to England burdened with his promise, and yet feeling no sacred promise in an oath wrung through a dastardly trick. Stigend, Archbishop of

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Harold; Act II, Scene 2

Canterbury, and Aldred, Archbishop of York, both absolve him from his vow. Edward, prophecying the approaching ruin of Anglo-Saxon England, dies fixing the succession upon Harold. His last act is to demand that his ward Edith, Harold's love, should retire into a convent and there by prayer expiate the sin of Harold's false vow. As two Archbishops have just absolved him from all blame in a vow made unwittingly, this seems unnecessary and improbable -- certainly far from an inevitable step in the dramatic action. Edith yields with but a single murmur:

EDITH. Oh! my lord, my King!
He knew not whom he swore by.
EDWARD. Yea, I know
He knew not, but those heavenly ears have heard,
Their curse is on him; wilt thou bring another,
Edith, upon his head?
EDITH. No, no, not I.
EDWARD. Why then, thou must not wed him.
HAROLD. Wherefore, wherefore?
EDWARD. O son, when thou dist tell me of thine oath,
I sorrow'd for my random promise given
To yon fox-lion. I did not dream then
I should be king. -- My son, the Saints are virgins;
They love the white rose of virginity,
The cold, white lily blowing in her cell:
I have been myself a virgin; and I sware
To consecrate my virgin here to heaven --
The silent, cloister'd, solitary life,
A life of life-long prayer against the curse
That lies on thee and England.
HAROLD. No, no, no.
EDWARD. Treble denial of the tongue of flesh,
Like Peter's when he fell, and thou wilt have
To wail for it like Peter. O my son!
Are all oaths to be broken then, all promises
Made in our agony for help from heaven?
Son, there is one who loves thee: and a wife,

What matters who, so she be serviceable
In all obedience, as mine own hath been:
God bless thee, wedded daughter.
[Laying his hand on the Queen's head.] (1)

We suspect the forcing of Edith into a nunnery a bit of dramatic expediency on the part of the author in order to deepen the tragedy of Harold's approaching doom, and clear the way for the treacherous desires of Aldwyth, widowed Queen of Wales, who wishes to wed him.

After Edward's death, Harold is crowned king and immediately moves on Northumbria to quell a rebellion instigated by the false Aldwyth. Harold, hoping to cement all England into one, consents to marry Aldwyth, although he knows her treachery has sown the desire for this union among the people. He yields to pressure:

MORCAR. Thine own meaning, Harold,
To make all England one, to close all feuds,
Mixing our bloods, that thence a king may rise
Half-Godwin and half-Alfgar, one to rule
All England beyond question, beyond quarrel.
HAROLD. Who sow'd this fancy here among the people?
MORCAR. Who knows what sows itself among the people?
A goodly flower at times.
HAROLD. The Queen of Wales?
Why, Morcar, it is all but duty in her
To hate me; I have heard she hates me.
MORCAR. No.
For I can swear to that, but cannot swear
That these will follow thee against the Norsemen,
If thou deny them this.
HAROLD. Morcar and Edwin,
When will ye cease to plot against my house?
EDWIN. The king can scarcely dream that we, who know
His prowess in the mountains of the West,
Should care to plot against him in the North.
MORCAR. Who dares arraign us, king, of such a plot?
HAROLD. Ye heard one witness even now.

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(1) Tennyson: Harold; Act III, Scene 1

MORCAR. The craven!
There is a faction risen again for Tostig
Since Tostig came with Norway -- fright not love.
HAROLD. Morcar and Edwin, will ye, if I yield,
Follow against the Norsemen?
MORCAR. Surely, surely.
HAROLD. Morcar and Edwin, will ye upon oath
Help us against the Norman?
MORCAR. With good will;
Yea, take the Sacrament upon it, king.
HAROLD. Where is thy sister?

* * * * * *

HAROLD. Canst thou love one, who cannot love again?
ALDWYTH. Full hope have I that love will answer love.
HAROLD. Then in the name of the great God, so be it!
Come, Alfred, join our hands before the hosts,
That all may see.

[Alfred joins the hands of Harold and Aldwyth and blesses them.] (1)

The marriage feast, however, is interrupted by the news that William of Normandy has landed upon the shores of England. Now comes the final struggle between Saxon and Norman at Hastings and Harold falls, the victim of the fateful arrow. Edith, crazed, seeks his body among the dead, claiming theirs a secret marriage and she his bride. Dying she cries to Aldwyth:

". . . . Look you, we never mean to part again.
I have found him, I am happy.
Was there not some one ask'd me for forgiveness?
I yield it freely, being the true wife
Of this dead King, who never bore revenge." (2)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Harold; Act IV, Scene 1
(2) Ibid.; Act V, Scene 2

So William of Normandy takes possession of England, vindicated by the saints, vindicated in his confidence in his own destiny, vindicated in his use of treachery, cruelty, craft, and deceit: "Praise the Saints. It is over. No more blood! I am King of England. . . " Turning to the false, perfidious Aldwyth, William says: "Madam, we will entreat thee with all honor." Aldwyth's curtain line, falls flatly upon our ears and provides a weak culmination for the tragedy: "My punishment is more than I can bear." What is Aldwyth's punishment? The death of her bridegroom, Harold? Many a virtuous wife and mother had that day given her husband and sons to England. She was not the only woman bereft of the man she loved.

We ask ourselves after finishing the play, what is the significance that Tennyson wished it to hold for us? Harold is the one man in the play who seems big enough to rise above crude superstition and religious ignorance, above a gross slavery to supernatural dread, and walk with his head in the pure air of reason. Well, how does Tennyson reward him? Instead of vindicating him for this independence of mind, Tennyson makes his very independence the agent that accomplishes his downfall. Meanwhile, William, the perpetrator of the trick, a juggler using religious superstition to further his own selfish plans,

rises triumphantly at the dénouement, a perfect example of "the end justifies the means." Harold's character is not drawn consistently throughout. At one time he is but the mouthpiece of a nineteenth/century playwright who uses this guise as a vehicle to vent his hatred of Rome, his pride in his own Saxon heritage, his scorn of eighth century theological darkness. At another time, Tennyson merges himself with the eleventh century hero who is fighting against the bonds of superstition and error, and yet bound by doubts and fears which all his reason cannot dispel. The conflict of Saxon and Norman is shown by one who wishes, it would seem, that truth to historical fact did not force him to lay Harold in the dust and place William on the English throne.

There is no sense of inevitability hurrying us from event to event in the play. It is one of Aristotle's commands that the events of a play should follow, if not inevitably, at least without violating improbability, but nothing in this play seems to happen because, obeying the natural law of cause and effect, it must happen. Even the poet, too, seems to have failed, for Horace says: "Poetic charm can make absurdity imperceptible." Certainly Tennyson did not work with that consummate technique which rendered dramatic flaws imperceptible.

Tennyson called the play "Harold" his "Tragedy of Doom."

"Winds and waves, Harold's own acts, so alien to his nature, and even circumstances fight against him and yet he still holds to duty, nobleness, and patriotism. The truthful Harold's false oath by the saints of Normandy gives the tragic unity to the action." (1)

The poet was very much pleased with the review of the published play that appeared in the "Times" for October 18, 1876, by Professor Jebb. He said that the review contained most of what he himself had to say about Harold as a subject for drama:

"No historical character unites more completely than Harold all the elements of dramatic effect. His military genius, his civil virtues, his loyal and fearless championship of England against the dominion of strangers; his liberality, which has for its perpetual monument his secular foundation of Waltham; his frank and open bearing, in which prudent contemporaries blamed too slight a regard for self-interest; his generous courage, which panegyrists could not wholly vindicate from the charge of rashness; his tall stature, his comely countenance, that mighty physical strength to which the pictures of the Bayeux tapestry bear witness -- all these things make Harold a man fit to stand as the central figure of a drama." (2)

"Harold" drew forth great praise from George H. Lewes, the husband of George Eliot. However, from his letter we learn that the dramatic critics of the day were far from reflecting the enthusiasm expressed by such men of letters as Lewes:

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son, page 186
(2) The "Times" (October 18, 1876): Review of "Harold" by Professor Jebb

"My dear Tennyson,

"We have just read 'Harold' (for the first time) and 'Mary' (for the fourth) and greatly wish you had been here to read certain scenes, especially that masterly interview between Harold and William, or that most pathetic close of 'Mary.' It is needless for me to say how profound a pleasure both works have given us -- they are great contributions! and your wretched critics who would dissuade you from enriching literature with such dramas must be forgiven, 'for they know not what they say.' It is not however to carry ~~to~~ coals of applause to your Newcastle that I scribble these lines, but to enquire whether there is a hope of your being at Blackdown this summer and of our seeing you?

Yours truly,
G.H.Lewes" (June 1877) (1)

From American Longfellow wrote to Tennyson:

"My dear Tennyson,

"I have just been reading your 'Harold' and am delighted with its freshness, strength and beauty. Like 'Boadicea' it is a voice out of the Past, sonorous, strange, semi-barbaric. What old ancestor of yours is it thus speaking through you?

"The Fifth Act is a masterly piece of dramatic writing. I know not where to look for anything better.

"This being the shortest day of the year I make my letter correspond.

"I wish you knew, I wish you could possibly know, the power of your poetry in this country. It would make your heart go forth towards the thirty or forty million of English on this side of the Atlantic.

"With cordial congratulations on your great success, and kind remembrances,

Your friend and admirer,
Henry W. Longfellow." (2)

Robert Browning was delighted with the play:

"My dear Tennyson,

"True thanks again, this time for the best of Christmas presents, another great work, wise, good, and beautiful. The scene where Harold is overborne to take

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(1) Tennyson's Memoir, by his son ; page 192
(2) Ibid. ; page 188

the oath is perfect, for one instance. What a fine new ray of light you are entwining with your many coloured wreath!

"I know the Conqueror's country pretty well: stood last year in his Castle of Bonneville, on the spot where tradition is that Harold took the oath: and I have passed through Dives, the place of William's embarcation, perhaps twenty times: and more than once visited the church there, built by him, where still are inscribed the names of Norman knights who accompanied him in his expedition. You light this up again for me. All happiness befall you and yours this good season and ever.

Yours affectionately,
R. Browning." (Dec. 21, 1876) (1)

BECKET

In 1884 Tennyson published the drama entitled "Becket." The first proofs of the play were printed in 1879, but it was not published until December, 1884. In 1879 Sir Henry Irving refused the play, thinking the cost of production too great to risk, but in 1891 he asked leave to produce it, holding "that the taste of the theater-going public had changed in the interval, and that it was now likely to be a success on the stage." It proved successful both in England and in America. It was produced at the Lyceum, February 6, 1893, and at the Drury Lane, April 29, 1905. A "command performance" was given at Windsor Castle for Queen Victoria on March 18, 1893, with Henry Irving supported by Ellen Terry. This play is forever associated with the name of Irving, as that great actor died while playing the

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son ; page 189

altar scene. Irving gives "Becket" great praise for its "moments of passion and pathos, which, when they exist, atone to an audience for the endurance of long acts." When the play had run through its fiftieth performance at the Lyceum in 1893, Irving wrote to Tennyson's son:

"We have passed the fiftieth performance of 'Becket,' which is in the heyday of its success. I think that I may, without hereafter being credited with any inferior motive, give again the opinion which I previously expressed to your loved and honoured father. To me 'Becket' is a very noble play, with something of that lofty feeling and that far-reaching influence, which belong to a 'passion play.' There are in it moments of passion and pathos which are the aim and end of dramatic art, and which, when they exist, atone to an audience for the endurance of long acts. Some of the scenes and passages, especially in the last act, are full of sublime feeling, and are with regard to both their dramatic effectiveness and their poetic beauty as fine as anything in our language. I know that such a play has an ennobling influence on both the audience who see it and the actors who play in it." (1)

Tennyson's son says:

"As a stage tragedy Irving has told us that 'Becket' is one of the three most successful plays produced by him at the Lyceum. . . . . Irving's arrangement has been criticised as too episodical; but the thread of human interest remains strong enough for its purpose, as from first to last it holds the audience in an attitude of rapt attention. Assuredly Irving's interpretation of the many-sided, many-mooded, statesman-soldier-saint was a vivid and as subtle a piece of acting as has been seen in our day.

"He says truly that one of the chief keynotes of the character is to be found in the following lines which he

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son; page 196

always gave with an indescribable tenderness, as if looking back to and recalling the daydream of his youth:

'BECKET. There was a little fair-hair'd Norman maid,
Lived in my mother's house: if Rosamund is
The world's rose, as her name imports her -- she
Was the world's lily.
JOHN OF SALISBURY. Ay, and what of her?
BECKET. She died of leprosy.
JOHN OF SALISBURY. I know not why
You call these old things back again, my lord.
BECKET. The drowning man, they say, remembers all
The chances of his life, just ere he dies.'" (1)

The fact that Irving was impressed by Tennyson's dramas does not seem to William Archer, the famous English critic and playwright, as any proof of their inherent worth. Archer says in his brilliant book "The Old Drama and the New":

"Meanwhile Henry Irving was establishing his reign at the Lyceum, but doing practically nothing for the English drama. He had very little literary or dramaturgic sense, and his talent and training both led him back to the rhetorical tradition. He produced in the seventies two notable works inspired by that tradition, 'Charles the First,' by W. G. Wills, and 'Queen Mary' by Alfred Tennyson; but neither took a permanent place on the stage."(2)

The play "Becket" was the last and best of Tennyson's historical trilogy. Here we find a great theme, the struggle between church and state for supremacy, put into the terms of the flesh and blood characters of Becket and Henry. This drama is, really, a long duel between these two great, puissant personalities, each using all his advantages, moral, intellectual,and material, to break the

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son
(2) Archer, William: The Old Drama and the New; page 270

will of the other. This gigantic conflict of wills is foreshadowed in the prologue, where the King and his Chancellor face each other over a chess board; and it ends when Becket lies dead upon his altar steps, a victim to Henry's hate. The two men are powerfully drawn, and breathe the breath of life. Eleanor, the Queen, too, is conceived with great subtlety of portraiture. Hers is a jealousy that outlives love and finds itself allied with other passions. She hates Rosamund, not because she is Henry's paramour -- to that she would be indifferent -- but because she has won the love which Eleanor herself never held. She hates Rosamund, too, because the woman whom Henry loves could be a power behind the throne. All of Eleanor's thwarted passion had rushed to augment her natural craving for power. She wished to be a power in the state, and this she could be only by retaining a hold upon the King. She hates Rosamund, too, because Becket protects her and Becket is another avenue through which the power of the realm flows.

The chief strength of this play lies in the character studies of Becket and the King, each admirably conceived and nobly rendered. Especially is the character of Becket worthy of the highest commendation. Strong, vigorous, vital, still it is free from exaggeration, caricature or idealization.

Tennyson's son says:

"My father's view of Becket was as follows: Becket was a really great and impulsive man, with a firm sense of duty, and, when he renounced the world, looked upon himself as the head of that Church which was the people's 'tower of strength, their bulwark against throne, and baronage.' This idea so far wrought in his dominant nature as to betray him into many rash acts; and later he lost himself in the idea. His enthusiasm reached a spiritual ecstasy which carries the historian along with it; and his humanity and abiding tenderness for the poor, the weak and the unprotected, heighten the impression so much as to make the poet feel passionately the wronged Rosamund's reverential devotion for him (most touchingly rendered by Ellen Terry), when she kneels praying over his body in Canterbury Cathedral." (1)

As in "Queen Mary," so in this play we see Tennyson's religious bias very clearly. He is no impartial, objective artist, but a partisan actively and persistently enlisting our sympathy for Henry in his argument against the church. The plea for the secular control of the clergy is written straight from the deepest convictions of Alfred Tennyson himself, speaking through the mouth of Henry Plantaganet. Becket's answer is half-hearted and is stated merely on theological grounds.

As we saw in his other historical plays, Tennyson is intensely English, but he is even more intensely anti-Roman. To him the cause of the church for which Becket stood was the claim of a foreign power to interfere in England's national affairs, the claim of the church to be supreme in all matters regarding conscience and conduct.

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son; page 195

This he abhorred, and this, through Henry, he denounces vehemently. He allows Henry to win all the honors in the debates, and cannot play the objective dramatic artist sufficiently to put an equally strong case in Becket's mouth. Never could it be written of Tennyson what Hesketh Pearson writes of Shakespeare:

> "Sir Sidney Lee, a man of business, laid stress on Shakespeare's business acumen; Frank Harris, a confessed sensualist, made Shakespeare a sensualist; Bernard Shaw, a social reformer, would have us believe that Shakespeare was agitated by the social problems of his period. And so on and so forth. In short, Shakespeare was an artist, and therefore remains a source of perpetual irritation to the puritans and propagandists who admire a man with a clear, clean-cut message, an uplifting philosophy of life and all the rest of the canting twaddle that no self-respecting artist will stand at any price." (1)

Yet while Tennyson has absolutely no sympathy with Becket's cause, the great personality of the man himself has won his respect, admiration, and love. He conceives him a noble figure. There is nothing of the wily, crafty, intriguing, black-robed priest, his ecclesiastical finger in every political pie, about Tennyson's Becket. Given the poet's intense dislike of Rome, it would have been easy for him to have drawn a churchman who would be a justification of his antagonism. But fortunately he was a great enough artist not to fall into this error. Becket is a humanitarian, honest and zealous, staunch and stalwart,

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(1) Article in the "New York Times", for Oct. 4, 1931

capable of great thoughts, great deeds, and great sacrifices. Above all, he is not a remote saint but a warm human being, carrying about with him the same passion and affections that the rest of his human brethren have to reckon with as children of Adam. Full of the milk of human kindness he seems, and though he pursues his monastic way willingly and cheerfully, still he experiences to the fullest a realization of all that he has missed. In the quiet of the cloister, he can visualize the love of wife and child given up by him forever. He has no regrets, but a sigh escapes him at the thought of all that he has relinquished and which, if he had not been called to the service of God, would have meant much in his life. He dares to speak his mind to John of Salisbury never fearing for a moment that he will be misunderstood:

". . . . . how much we lose, we celibates,
Lacking the love of woman and of child!" (1)

After all, human relationships give life much of its significance, and a priest in severing all the ties that bind him in the world, the tie to wife and child and home, gives up a great deal, indeed.

When near death, and his life passes in review as a panorama before him, he says:

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket ; Act V, Scene 2

"The drowning man, they say, remembers all
The chances of his life, just ere he dies." (1)

At another time, he recalls with poignant pathos the memory of a little fair-haired Norman maid in his mother's house who died of leprosy:

"BECKET. There was a little fair-haired Norman maid
Lived in my mother's house; if Rosamund is
The world's rose, as her name imports her -- she
Was the world's lily.
JOHN OF SALISBURY. Ay, and what of her?
BECKET. She died of leprosy." (1)

Yes, if Becket is renouncing the world and all its pleasures, he knows full well the rigor of his sacrifice and self-discipline. His is not the virtue of the untempted man, but that virtue that comes from self-denial, self-restraint, and self-abnegation.

A man of deep passions, impulsive and warm impulses, John of Salisbury's doubt is natural:

"And may there not be something
Of this world's leaven in thee, too, when crying
On Holy Church to thunder out her rights
And thine own wrong so pitilessly? Ah, Thomas,
The lightnings that we think are only Heaven's
Flash sometimes out of earth against the heavens.
The soldier, when he lets his whole self go
Lost in the common good, the common wrong,
Strikes truest even for his own self. I crave
Thy pardon -- I have still thy leave to speak.
Thou hast waged God's war against the King; and yet
We are self-uncertain creatures, and we may,
Yea, even when we know not, mix our spites
And private hates with our defence of Heaven." (2)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Act V, Scene 2
(2) Ibid.

Like Guinevere, we admire Tennyson's Becket because, although he is not a low sun, he has a touch of earth in him -- he is far from a faultless, passionate perfection. Archbishop's robes though he may wear, he's a man for a' that. He has been a valiant and tried soldier, a wise statesman, a loyal advisor to his friend, the king, before he occupies the see of Canterbury, and he carries to his ecclesiastical duties the fearless courage of the soldier and the intellectual vigor of the statesman.

He has renounced the world but he is one who knows full well the value of that which he rejects. It is not that he loved the world less, but that he loved the call of Christ more. In the Prologue Henry jests at Becket's appreciation of the good things of life:

"Come, come, I love thee and I know thee, I know thee,
A doter on white pheasant-flesh at feasts,
A sauce-deviser for thy days of fish,
A dish-designer, and most amorous
Of good old red sound liberal Gascon wine." (1)

This is the King's description of his friend and chancellor, and Becket admits his epicureanism cheerfully but insists on this differentiation:

"Men are God's trees, and women are God's flowers;
And when the Gascon wine mounts to my head,
The trees are all the statelier, and the flowers
Are all the fairer." (2)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Prologue
(2) Ibid.

To him appreciation is quite a different thing from abuse and he repels the suggestion of abuse:

"HENRY. And thy thoughts, thy fancies?
BECKET. Good dogs, my liege, well train'd, and easily call'd
Off from the game.
HENRY. Save for some once or twice,
When they ran down the game and worried it.
BECKET. No, my liege, no! -- not once -- in God's name, no!
HENRY. Nay, then, I take thee at thy word -- believe thee
The veriest Galahad of old Arthur's hall." (1)

One of the questions that arises as we study the character of Becket is how much of the Wolsey and of the Richelieu did he have in him? In other words, was it personal ambition that made him withstand Henry and fight with him one of the bitterest battles of wills that has ever been known? Clearly, Tennyson did not think that Becket used the King's friendship as an avenue of approach to the highest and final seat of authority in England outside the throne itself. Often a man has latent potentialities which even he himself is unaware of until they appear, called forth by some critical situation. Witness Shakespeare's conception of Anthony's character. While his friend Julius Caesar held the reins of power, Anthony was content to be one who loved games: a gamester, says Brutus, "given to sports, to wildness and much company." But, as soon as the

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket ; Prologue

mighty Julius had fallen, there arose a new Anthony, the Anthony who faced Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, the man who could plot with Octavius the establishment of a mighty Roman empire. New responsibilities, new situations summon from within us new selves, hitherto unsuspected, to cope with them. It was such a latent Becket that sprang into being when the chancellor of England became the Archbishop of Canterbury, the representative of the Pope of Rome.

As chancellor, in the question of scutage, Becket had backed Henry against the Church, but we feel that in this matter he had been guided by his conscience, neither wishing to oppress the Church nor yet desirous of seeing her encroach upon the rights of the state.

". . . . for it seem'd to me but just
The Church should pay her scutage like the lords." (1)

We wonder why Becket accepted the See of Canterbury without first warning Henry that, henceforth, the church and her interests would take in his thoughts precedence over all else. We can hardly call the unfinished jest of the prologue a warning:

"Make <u>me</u> archbishop! Why, my liege, I know
Some three or four poor priests a thousand times
Fitter for this grand function. <u>Me</u> archbishop!
God's favor and king's favor might so clash
That thou and I -- That were a jest indeed!" (2)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket ; Act I, Scene 1
(2) Ibid.; Prologue

Henry is not the first man in history who has taken too much for granted in his friends. With him the wish was father to the fact, itself. He wished Becket, as Archbishop, to be a pliable tool in his hands, a counter-clerical influence at work where the Church should be strongest; the fact that Becket's conscience might not sanction his plans never occurred to him. Henry is a supreme egoist; there is only one right in any controversy -- his wish, and anyone who dares thwart that incurs his deadly enmity. It never occurs to Henry that, as Chancellor, Becket may be serving the state as well as the King, that he may be obedient to the general good and common weal, and that he may be honestly obeying the dictates of justice. Henry sees in his Chancellor but a faithful, reliable, personal servant, honored by his King's friendship, trusted with his stewardship. There was no need then for sharp definition of terms, for differentiations of duty and loyalty, because the interests of King and Chancellor lay parallel. But the interests of the King of the State and the Prince of the Church do not lie parallel; and so, for the first time, their wills cross. That, in opposing his will, Becket might have been acting still in accordance with his former code, still obeying his conscience as his God, never occurred to Henry. He saw in Becket's refusal to work his will but one thing, base ingratitude, disloyalty.

He utterly fails to credit him with a sense of duty, an independent judgment, a right of choice. It would seem as if Henry must have sensed the great power of this man's mind, his intellectual independency, for his was not the slave mind. A prince of the Church, holder of the highest ecclesiastical office in the British Isles, Becket felt coordinate with, if not superior to, the temporal power of the realm, not subservient to it. Tennyson is sufficiently a dramatist to realize this dignity of position in the Archbishop that he has created, and makes him resolute, fearless, absolutely justified to himself in his support of the Church and his opposition of the King. Becket regrets his lost friend; he doubts the integrity of his election; he doubts his own fitness for his high office; but his full and uncompromising support of the Church, once he has definitely accepted the position, he never doubts for a minute. Having accepted the See of Canterbury, God helping him, he can do none other than he does. This sincerity Tennyson makes us feel. In fact, Tennyson's Becket can stand comparison with Bulwer-Lytton's Richelieu and Shakespeare's great Cardinal Wolsey as a mighty prelate and prince of the Church.

However, granted his uncompromising sincerity and unwavering resolution, once he is invested with his office,

to me it would have been far more effective dramatically if Tennyson had let us see Becket struggling between his friendship and fealty to the King and his desire to take up the work of the King of Kings in which he would be bound, in conscience, to the Church. Then, from the throes of this struggle, should be born the mighty decision: "Conscience shall rule supreme; come what may come as a consequence, -- my work shall be the Lord's!" Tennyson, on the contrary, begins his play after Becket has fought this inner fight. Somewhere between the Prologue when he tells Henry:

"Then for thy barren jest
Take thou mine answer in bare commonplace --
Nolo episcopari," (1)

and the rising of the curtain on Act I when we see the Archbishop in his robes of office, he makes the tremendous decision which alters the course of his life and brings him down to his grave. We only see the consequences; not the struggle itself.

We like a gradual, though inevitable, development of character, the incidents and episodes of the play but serving to make such a development plain to the audience. For example, Macbeth is but tempted in the first act. The seeds planted by the witches in Act I spring into dangerous

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket, Prologue

life through the instigation of his wife, but still the struggle goes on within his breast and he is torn between his nobler self and his evil ambition. Fate conspires against him; the king sleeps that night at Inverness. He murders Duncan and precipitates himself into a career of crime which sweeps him on to ruin. Lost morally, we wonder if his superb physical courage will desert him when his material world crumbles about him. Will he, like the false Claudius, whine: "Desert me not; I am but hurt!" A murderous, but not a craven heart is his. Bayed at last, his throne toppled over, his queen dead, his eternal soul already sunk into perdition, still with dauntless courage he cries to the man not of woman born:

" . . . . before my body
I throw my warlike shield; lay on, Macduff;
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'" (1)

Cassius does but whet Brutus against Caesar in the first act of their tragedy, and breathlessly we watch the turmoil rage in Brutus's breast, a struggle which we feel will end inevitably in his joining the conspiracy which means his death. But Tennyson shows us no such character development, here. To be sure, early in the Prologue, Becket's answer may serve as a finger-post to what his position will be later. But, if taken as an indication of his attitude,

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(1) Shakespeare, William: Macbeth, Act V, Scene 8

we have a sense of finality instead of a conflict:

" . . . . Me archbishop!
God's favor and king's favor might so clash
That thou and I -- That were a jest indeed!" (1)

Act I shows Becket in his Archbishop's robes. But no struggle goes on within his breast, nor is he torn with torturing fluctuation between his love for his friend and his King, on the one hand, and his Church, and his ecclesiastical vows, on the other. No! His mind is already firmly resolved upon the course that he is to pursue, regardless of consequences. With the Church he takes his stand: "I am his no more, and I must serve the Church." This decision, I think, in a Shakespearian tragedy would come either as a major or a minor climax, and would directly contribute to the ultimate tragedy of the hero of the action. But practically upon the rising of the curtain in Act I Tennyson has Becket say:

" . . . . . I am the man.
And yet I seem appall'd -- on such a sudden
At such an eagle-height I stand and see
The rift that runs between me and the King.
I served our Theobald well when I was with him;
I served King Henry well as Chancellor;
I am his no more, and I must serve the Church.
This Canterbury is only less than Rome,
And all my doubts I fling from me like dust,
Winnow and scatter all scruples to the wind,
And all the puissance of the warrior,
And all the wisdom of the Chancellor,
And all the heap'd experience of life.
I cast upon the side of Canterbury --
Our holy mother Canterbury, who sits

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket, Prologue

With tatter's robes. Laics and barons, thro'
The random gifts of careless kings, have graspt
Her livings, her advowsons, granges, farms,
And goodly acres -- we will make her whole;
Not one rood lost. And for these Royal customs,
These ancient Royal customs -- they are Royal,
Not of the Church -- and let them be anathema.
And all that speak for them anathema.
HERBERT. Thomas, thou are moved too much.
BECKET. O Herbert, here
I gash myself asunder from the King,
Tho' leaving each, a wound; mine own, a grief
To show the scar for ever -- his, a hate
Not ever to be heal'd." (1)

That final prophecy, it seems to me, foreshadows too completely the end of the play. It robs the action of that element of suspense so essential to the well-constructed drama. As if to drive it home to the last man in the audience who has the least doubt of the outcome, a bit further along in Act I the new Archbishop says again, as he bids farewell to his Chancellorship:

". . . O thou Great Seal of England,
Given me by my dear friend, the King of England --
We long have wrought together, thou and I --
Now must I send thee as a common friend
To tell the King, my friend, I am against him.
We are friends no more; he will say that, not I.
The worldly bond between us is dissolved,
Not yet the love. Can I be under him
As Chancellor? as Archbishop over him?
Go therefore like a friend slighted by one
That hath climb'd up to nobler company.
Not slighted -- all but moan'd for. Thou must go.
I have not dishonor'd thee -- I trust I have not --
Not mangled justice. May the hand that next
Inherits thee be but as true to thee
As mine hath been! O, my dear friend, the King!

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket , Act I, Scene 1

O brother! -- I may come to martyrdom.
I am martyr in myself already. " (1)

Here he predicts the exact way in which Henry's resentful hate will take form -- his own martyrdom! Now that we foresee so clearly the outcome, we lose some of our interest in the intervening action.

The plot of "Becket" is not one to awaken any strong emotional response in a modern audience. The ancient English quarrel between church and state is now a dead issue and never was a romantic nor a dramatic one. The term itself, "customs", is most obscure even, I should imagine, to an English audience. We strain our memories to recall what they were, and find our knowledge of history here confused and vague. We are grateful to John of Oxford when he reads the debatable statutes for us, but they are so numerous and the spoken word is so ephemeral that it is hard to retain them in mind.

"BECKET. Where is the King?
ROGER OF YORK. Gone hawking on the Nene,
His heart so gall'd with thine ingratitude,
He will not see thy face till thou hast sign'd
These ancient laws and customs of the realm.
Thy sending back the Great Seal madden'd him;
He all but pluck'd the bearer's eyes away.
Take heed lest he destroy thee utterly.

* * * * *

JOHN OF OXFORD. Peace, peace, my lords! these customs are no longer
As Canterbury calls them, wandering clouds,

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket, Act I, Scene 1

But by the King's command are written down,
And by the King's command I, John of Oxford,
The President of this Council, read them.
BECKET. Read!
JOHN OF OXFORD. [reads.] 'All causes of advowsons and presentations, whether laymen or clerics, shall be tried in the King's court.'
BECKET. But that I cannot sign; for that would drag
The cleric before the civil judgment-seat,
And on a matter wholly spiritual.
JOHN OF OXFORD. 'If any cleric be accused of felony, the Church shall not protect him; but he shall answer to the summons of the King's court to be tried therein.'
BECKET. And that I cannot sign.
Is not the Church the visible Lord on earth?
Shall hands that do create the Lord be bound
Behind the back like laymen-criminals?
The Lord be judged again by Pilate? No!
JOHN OF OXFORD. 'When a bishopric falls vacant, the King, till another be appointed, shall receive the revenues thereof.'
BECKET. And that I cannot sign. Is the King's treasury
A fit place for the moneys of the Church,
That be the patrimony of the poor?
JOHN OF OXFORD. 'And when the vacancy is to be filled up, the King shall summon the chapter of that church to court, and the election shall be made in the Chapel Royal, with the consent of our lord the King, and by the advice of his Government.'
BECKET. And that I cannot sign; for that would make
Our island-Church a schism from Christendom,
And weight down all free choice beneath the throne.
FOLIOT. And was thine own election so canonical,
Good father?
BECKET. If it were not, Gilbert Foliot,
I mean to cross the sea to France, and lay
My crozier in the Holy Father's hands,
And bid him re-create me, Gilbert Foliot.
FOLIOT. Nay; by another of these customs thou
Wilt not be suffer'd so to cross the seas
Without the license of our Lord the King.
BECKET. That, too, I cannot sign."(1)

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Act I, Scene 3

At this point, the stage direction reads, "five knights start up -- a clash of swords." "Sign and obey!" they shout at Becket, and the rest of the scene is given over to a wrangling over this same question of signing the customs.

With the exception of a few good lines from Henry later in the scene, stating the case of the state, we have very few scenes bodying forth a mighty conflict couched in the strong language of strong wills. Where we should have a logical presentation of a view point, we have, in Act I, personal insults and recriminations hurled about the council chamber. The episode of the crosses at the end of Scene III, in this same Act, is most undignified, to my mind, and lowers the tone of the drama, materially hurting the dignity of the leading character, Becket. To see the two great Archbishops, Canterbury and York, pulling one another's croziers about the stage is rather silly if not downright ludicrous.

"Enter BECKET, holding his cross of silver before him. The BISHOPS come round him."

* * * * * *

"Enter ROGER OF YORK, with his cross, advancing to BECKET.

BECKET. Wherefore dost thou presume to bear thy cross,
Against the solemn ordinance from Rome,
Out of thy province?

ROGER OF YORK. Why dost thou prosume,
Arm'd with thy cross, to come before the King,
If Canterbury bring his cross to court,
Let York bear his to mate with Canterbury.
FOLIOT. [seizing hold of BECKET's cross] Nay, nay,
my lord, thou must not brave the King.
Nay, let me have it. I will have it!
BECKET. Away! [Flinging him off.] " (1)

This is not great drama. A good struggle of wills, a powerful clash of desires is of the essence of good drama but not this wrangling. This scene is more nearly related to what Archer calls mediaeval "flyting" than to the dignified conflict of great drama. Archer, in arguing the need of a conflict, has this to say:

"For a sufficient account of the matter, we need go no further than the simple psychological observation that human nature loves a fight, whether it be with clubs or with swords, with tongues or with brains. One of the earliest forms of mediaeval drama was the 'estrif or flyting' -- the scolding match between husband and wife, or between two rustic gossips. This motive is glorified in the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, degraded in the patter of two 'knockabout comedians.' Certainly there is nothing more telling in drama than a piece of 'cut-and thrust' dialogue after the fashion of the ancient 'stitchomythia.' When a whole theme involving conflict, or even a single scene of the nature described as a 'passage-at-arms' comes naturally in the playwright's way, by all means let him seize the opportunity." (2)

Tennyson has failed to glorify the conflict between Canterbury and York, and we have just a squabble.

The love theme in this play is far from pleasant in its relation to the principal character of Becket. To have

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket ; Act I, Scene 3
(2) Archer, William: Playmaking ; pages 32-33

His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury, serve as the protector of the King's paramour, pandering to his lust, is not in keeping with the personality that Tennyson has built up for Becket. I think Eleanor's reproof most justifiable: "She [the Church] that binds the bond, herself should see that kings are faithful to their marriage vow." If Becket is the true churchman Tennyson portrays him, why does he not exhort the King to give up his mistress and give his loyalty to his Queen, the mother of his four sons? Tennyson's use of the Archbishop's robes to hide the mistress of the King weakens the character of Becket. In his infinite charity Canterbury could pity Rosamund, shelter her, even, if she were cast aside by the King; but the idea of his protecting the King's mistress while the King is away on a business trip does not seem to accord with the grandeur and the sublimity that doth hedge in an Archbishop of Canterbury.

The character of Rosamund is puzzling. She is pretty, appealing, and tragical, and her love for the King is one of the most affecting things in the whole play. It is hard to believe that she does not know that the King has a wife, the mother of four sons, when in the very next breath she knows and recites all of Eleanor's history that rumor has flung abroad:

needed but their genius to rise to heights of perfection and sublimity. The nineteenth century, like the sixteenth century, had life, vitality, vigor, fresh intellectual and emotional currents but, unlike the Elizabethan Age, it had to spend this magnificent energy in an attempt to recreate a dramatic form. We wonder what Shakespeare would have accomplished without the work of the University Wits upon which to build his superstructure? Shakespeare sublimated the Revenge Play into "Hamlet"; the Hero Play into "Henry V"; but the neo-romanticists found upon the Victorian stage a cheap melodrama and a realistic prose tragedy which no amount of poetic genius could sublimate into a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Fortunately, Shakespeare did not have to waste his precious genius in metric invention; Marlowe had perfected blank verse for him. He did not have to create the romantic drama out of nothing; his predecessors had developed the form, and it lay there waiting for his hand. Shakespeare came in the fulness of time, a culmination to the glory of the Elizabethan drama; but the poetic dramatists of neo-romanticism ran counter to the stage of their own day.

Every critic speaks of Shakespeare's ability to take what he wanted from either the past or contemporary literature; he imitated, pillaged, plundered, and borrowed at will. But what was there upon the stage of their day for the Victorian poets to pillage? Their

only inspiration lay in the vanished glory of the Elizabethan Age; hence we have, in their dramas, not a preservation of all that was fine in the past, but rather an attempt at a restoration of the splendor of the past. In turning backward, they broke the dramatic tradition which runs like a thread from century to century. If, to the past, they had added the inspiration of the present, we might have had another age of dramatic splendor. As it was, they gave the world a restoration of the dramatic form of the Elizabethan Age, instead of a crystallization of the dramatic spirit of all the ages.

Not only was Shakespeare fortunate to have waiting for him a crude form, capable of infinite refinement; but he was fortunate, too, in possessing the particular genius needed to see the possibilities inherent in this form, and to accomplish the necessary refinement. If Tennyson and Browning had been contemporaries of Marlowe and Shakespeare, we wonder whether they would have been as quick to see these latent potentialities as Shakespeare was. Would they have had the genius to transform the diamond in the rough into a sparkling gem, fit to be the adornment of an era? Had the opportunity been theirs, could they have seized upon it?

Maladjustment of Victorian Poetic Dramatists to Tempo of Age

Not only was the temper of the age different in the Victorian Era but there was a change also in the tempo of life itself. Scientists are agreed that there is some law of acceleration at work in the universe and the history of literature plainly illustrates its application to the life of man. Since creation there has been continually at work throughout the world a speeding-up process, not noticeable perhaps in any one generation, but plainly noticeable over a period of three hundred years.

In the early ages of man, life moved in a tempo of inconceivable slowness. However, discovery and invention gradually quickened the pulse beat, and the tempo of life kept gradually increasing. As the centuries progressed, each adding its important contribution of knowledge to the world's store, the mind of man was being forced continually to make increasingly rapid adjustments to new modes of thought. The process is by no means ended, and so the rhythm of life grows ever faster and faster. The tempo of life varies in different parts of the world; it is faster in the West than in the East; it is faster in America than in Europe; it is faster in New York than on the farms of the Middle West; it is fastest of all on Broadway.

In James Truslow Adams's splendid article entitled "The Tempo of American Life", which appeared in Harper's Magazine, he describes most interestingly the speeding-up

process which has taken place throughout the ages. Rhythm, he says, in the universe is fundamental in its effect upon our minds.

"A change of rhythm, whatever it may be in reality, is for us a change in essential nature. . .

"I do not wish to press physical concepts too far and so I suggest an effect of rhythm which we encounter whenever we read poetry, and, though we are less conscious of it, prose. Certain sorts of thought or emotion go with certain rhythms. Let us take at haphazard two quotations from Shakespeare, the first being adapted by him from an old ballad.

King Stephen was a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown;
He held them sixpence all too dear,
With that he called the tailor down.

Now let us take another:

To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause . . .

Neither of these series of thoughts could be expressed in the rhythm of the other without profoundly altering its effects upon us. There is something in ourselves, some long-established rhythm of our own, which reacts in various ways to the rhythms of the outer world. A marked alteration in the tempo of life might, therefore, be expected to alter profoundly, possibly disastrously, our reactions." (1)

According to Adams, a marked acceleration in the tempo of life may alter our reactions. Small wonder then that the increased tempo of the nineteenth century found the poetic form of the sixteenth century drama too slow

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(1) Adams, James Truslow; The Tempo of American Life, article in Harper's Magazine, September 1931

for its pulse beat. Then, too, the dramatic acceleration was artificially increased to an even greater extent by the popular melodrama on the stage of the day. This maladjustment of the nineteenth century poetic dramatists to the tempo of their own age was one of the most potent causes of their failure. It is interesting to note that they were not fighting against the acceleration in the time-spirit, the increased tempo of the life of their day -- they were unconscious of it. We have a right to expect that, in the leaders of a literary art so closely identified with the life of an age as the drama surely is, we shall find an intensification of that tempo and energy which animates the great mass of the people in lesser degree. The nineteenth century poetic dramatists, however, dragged like a weight upon the stage of their day which was struggling to accelerate its pace. They failed to make the needed adjustments; they failed to create a new drama, the rhythmic pulse of which could beat in harmony with the new tempo of men's minds and actions. The melodrama of the day had, at least, kept pace with the tempo. In deed, its rhythm was vastly faster, and hence delighted the less intelligent, who live on a plane of mere sensation, by exciting their nerves and stimulating their emotions.

However injurious the nineteenth century craze for melodrama was to the advancement of genuine tragedy, it

'Eleanor of Aquitaine, Eleanor of England!
Murder'd by that adulteress Eleanor,
Whose doings are a horror to the east,
A hissing in the west!' Have we not heard
Raymond of Poitou, thine own uncle -- nay
Geoffrey Plantagenet, thine own husband's father --
Nay, even the accursed heathen Saladdeen --
Strike!
I challenge thee to meet me before God.
Answer me there." (1)

We have to smile at the Victorian sense of propriety which made Tennyson complicate his plot with the unreasonable invention that Rosamund was ignorant of the King's marriage. To be so, she must have been guileless indeed, and yet Tennyson represents her as a woman of intelligence as well as love, loyalty, and devotion. We should prefer to think of her as one who made a decision with eyes open for the sake of the man whom she loved. Surely, it is no ignorant girl that turns upon the Queen at threat of death, saying:

"And I will fly with my sweet boy to heaven,
And shriek to all the saints among the stars:
'Eleanor of Aquitaine, Eleanor of England!
Murder'd by that adultress Eleanor,
Whose doings are a horror to the east,
A hissing in the west!'" (2)

In Tennyson's effort to make Rosamund guileless, he has put too great a strain upon the credulity of the audience, and thereby weakens his play just so much.

In the midst of weighty affairs of Church and State, in the midst of a council in which he sits with the Kings

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Act IV, Scene 2
(2) Ibid.

of England and France, Becket must be getting back all speed to England.

"BECKET. See here!
HERBERT. What's here?
BECKET. A notice from the priest
To whom our John of Salisbury committed
The secret of the bower, that our wolf-Queen
Is prowling round the fold. I should be back
In England even for this." (1)

Herbert's answer seems one of the most sensible lines in the play:

"HERBERT. These are by-things
In the great cause.
BECKET. The by-things of the Lord
Are the wrong'd innocences that will cry
From all the hidden by-ways of the world
In the great day against the wronger. I know
Thy meaning. Perish she, I, all, before
The Church should suffer wrong!" (2)

In Becket's answer, are we supposed to infer that Rosamund is one of the "wrong'd innocences" of the Lord? I should be more inclined to say "of the King."

Almost at the very moment that Becket hears that Rosamund is in danger in her English bower, the King comes upon the stage and the two men apparently adjust their difficulties satisfactorily:

"HENRY [holding out his hand.] Give me thy hand. My Lords of France and England.
My friend of Canterbury and myself
Are now once more at perfect amnity.
Unkingly should I be, and most unknightly,

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Act III, Scene 3
(2) Ibid.

Not striving still, however much in vain,
To rival him in Christian charity." (1)

What restrains Becket from telling the King what he has just learned regarding Rosamund's danger, and from allowing Henry, the girl's logical protector, to assume the responsibility of her safety? Instead, no word does he speak to the King of her plight, but he himself rushes across the Channel to be her rescuer.

His thwarting of Eleanor's murderous designs upon Rosamund is used dramatically to bring about Becket's destruction. It could be one of the causes but why the immediate cause? Goaded to deadly fury by Eleanor's slanderous and poisonous suggestions, Henry's hatred knows no bounds and he exclaims:

"Methought I had recover'd of the Becket,
That all was planed and bevell'd smooth again,
Save from some hateful cantrip of thine own.
ELEANOR. I will go live and die in Aquitaine.
I dream'd I was the consort of a king,
Not one whose back his priest has broken.
HENRY. What!
Is the end come? You, will you crown my foe
My victor in mid-battle? I will be
Sole master of my house. The end is mine.
What game, what juggle, what devilry are you playing?
Why do you thrust this Becket on me again?
ELEANOR. Why? for I am true wife, and have my fears
Lest Becket thrust you even from your throne.
Do you know this cross, my liege?
HENRY [turning his head.] Away! Not I.
ELEANOR. Not even the central diamond, worth, I think,
Half of the Antioch whence I had it.
HENRY. That?
ELEANOR. I gave it you, and you your paramour;
She sends it back, as being dead to earth,
So dead henceforth to you.

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Act III, Scene 3

HENRY. Dead! you have murder'd her,
Found out her secret bower and murder'd her.
ELEANOR. Your Becket knew the secret of
your bower.
HENRY [calling out.] Ho there! thy rest of life
is hopeless prison.
O devil, can I free her from the grave?
ELEANOR. You are too tragic; both of us are players
In such a comedy as our court of Provence
Had laugh'd at. That's a delicate Latin lay
Of Walter Map; the lady holds the cleric
Lovelier than any soldier, his poor tonsure
A crown of Empire. Will you have it again?
[Offering the cross. He dashes it down.]
Saint Cupid, that is too irreverent.
Then mine once more. [Puts it on.]
Your cleric hath your lady.
Nay, what uncomely faces, could he see you!
Foam at the mouth because King Thomas, lord
Not only of your vassals but amours,
Thro' chastest honor of the Decalogue
Hath used the full authority of his Church
To put her into Godstow nunnery.
HENRY. To put her into Godstow nunnery!
He dared not -- liar! yet, yet I remember --
I do remember.
He bade me put her into a nunnery --
Into Godstow, into Hellstow, Devilstow!
The Church! The Church!
God's eyes! I would the Church were down in hell! [Exit]
ELEANOR. Aha!

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[Re-enter HENRY.]
HENRY. No man to love me, honor me, obey me!
Sluggards and fools!
The slave that eat my bread has kick'd his King!
The dog I cramm'd with dainties worried me!
The fellow that on a lame jade came to court,
A ragged cloak for saddle -- he, he, he,
To shake my throne, to push into my chamber --
My bed, where even the slave is private -- he --
I'll have her out again, he shall absolve
The bishops -- they but did my will -- not you --
Sluggards and fools, why do you stand and stare?
You are no King's men -- you -- you -- you -- are Becket's
men.

Down with King Henry! up with the Archbishop!
Will no man free me from this pestilent priest?" (1)

There are some beautiful lyrics strewn through this play. One of the best is Eleanor's song in Act I, and the dainty lyric seems to strike the key note of her character for the audience.

"Over! the sweet summer closes,
The reign of the roses is done;
Over and gone with the roses,
And over and gone with the sun.
Over! the sweet summer closes,
And never a flower at the close;
Over and gone with the roses,
And winter again and the snows."

Gone for her is the rose of love, her sun is set; cold, chilled, and blighted she lives on, a rank weed polluting the air about her. Of such as she Shakespeare writes when he says:

"Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

Eleanor's prose in the Prologue is of rare beauty. It reminds me of the polyphonic prose used by some of the present day dramatists.

"True, one rose will outblossom the rest, one rose in a bower. I speak after my fancies, for I am a Troubadour, you know, and won the violet at Toulouse; but my voice is harsh here, not in tune, a nightingale out of season; for marriage, rose or no rose, has killed the golden violet.
BECKET. Madam, you do ill to scorn wedded love.
ELEANOR. So I do. Louis of France loved me, and I dreamed that I loved Louis of France; and I loved Henry of England, and Henry of England dreamed that he loved me;

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket ; Act V, Scene 1

but the marriage-garland withers even with the putting on, the bright link rusts with the breath of the first after-marriage kiss, the harvest moon is the ripening of the harvest, and the honey-moon is the gall of Love; he dies of his honey-moon. I could pity this poor world myself that it is no better ordered." (1)

We find far more to praise in this play than to blame. It is an impressive piece of work, capable of proving theatrically effective, containing strong character portrayal, fine poetry, a stately and dignified theme, and a good, well-knit plot. Still, I should not care to see a revival of it. To me the stumbling block is the obscurity of the historical background. The warring claims of Church and State, finding expression in such controversies as the question of scutage and "customs", are no longer gripping themes. They fail to create any emotional response in the average theatergoer. Those tragedies of Shakespeare, we notice, that deal with personal issues are the most popular today: "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Othello," "Macbeth." Each of these plays is thrown against a historical background, but it is not the intellectual but the emotional side of the conflict that interests us.

Like Browning, Tennyson achieved singular success with the dramatic monologue which required a genius quite dif-

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(1) Tennyson, Alfred: Becket; Prologue

ferent from that needed by the playwright. Tennyson called his poems, "Locksley Hall" and "Sixty Years After", dramatic monologues. The poetic form which he used for his monologues scarcely varies at all. He puts the story into the mouth of a single character, who relates something that has happened in the past, or is happening in the present. Some other person, and here the dramatic element enters, is supposed to be near at hand. He never enters the story and we only know what he says by the speaker's repeating a part of what he has heard and replying to it. In fact, the presence of a second person is imperative otherwise we should have an extended soliloquy. The poor woman in "Rizpah" speaks to her visitor; the Northern Farmer to his servant; the Lord of Locksley Hall to his grandson; Maud's lover to his own half-mad self. Such is the form of the dramatic monologue that Tennyson uses, and he develops it with great beauty and effectiveness. Compared with the complexity of the drama, the monologue is a comparitively easy form to work in especially for one who, like Tennyson, combined a lyrical genius with the power to tell a good story.

The ability to write a good dramatic monologue does not imply, necessarily, the ability to write a good drama. It is a question whether Shakespeare, versatile artist

that he was, could have written a good dramatic monologue. He was in the habit of peopling the world of his imagination with throngs of different personalities from Caliban to Titania, Miranda to Lady Macbeth, King Lear to Polonius. Probably, he would have felt his genius cribbed and confined if forced into the mind of one single character. His men and women may have walked this earth with printless feet but they are more real to us than many whose veins ran real blood.

Now the writer of the dramatic monologue does not work in this objective way. He creates just one vivid personality through whose eyes he sees the world, and in whose personality he submerges his own. When the writer of the monologue turns to the drama, he is apt to continue to look out upon the world through the eyes of his characters, so that all the persons in the drama become merely so many mouthpieces through which the poet can express himself. Whether it be king or peasant, lover or assassin, we can see the shadow of the poet behind him, whispering his cues. So, at the core, all the characters will be of the same nature as the poet-playwright.

Another limitation with which the writer of the monologue is burdened when he steps over into the field of the drama is the fact that his inability to get an objective

point of view would probably render him incapable of making each character a distinct and highly differentiated personality. Naturally, it is just this distinction that makes a play interesting and the catastrophe significant.

The great dramatist, having created his world, stands aside as interested a spectator as we are, and almost as powerless to interfere with their life story. George Bernard Shaw tells us in his own inimitable way something of this "laissez-faire" policy:

> "I am asked to define the principles that govern the dramatist in his selection of themes and methods of treatment. But pray, who told you, gentlemen, that the dramatists are governed by principles, or that they have any choice in their selection of themes and methods?
>
> "I am not governed by principles; I am inspired, how or why I cannot explain, because I do not know; but inspiration it must be; for it comes to me without any reference to my own ends or interest.
>
> "I find myself possessed of a theme in the following manner. I am pushed by a natural need to set to work to write down the conversations that come into my head unaccountably. At first I hardly know the speakers, and cannot find names for them. Then they become more and more familiar, and I learn their names. Finally I come to know them very well, and discover what it is they are driving at, and why they have said and done the things I have been moved to set down.
>
> "This is not being 'guided by principles': it is hallucination; and sane hallucination is what we call play or drama." (1)

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(1) Shaw, George Bernard: On the Principles That Govern the Dramatist in His Selection of Themes, and Methods of Treatment

Great characters of drama are, I think, often more important than the dramatists who create them. Oedipus, Antigone, Hamlet, Lear, Romeo owe their immortality to their own personalities, and not to any revelation of the author's self which may be revealed through them. But it was difficult for either Tennyson or Browning to divest himself of his personality and stand aside, following a non-interference policy.

Then, too, the clever dramatist is constantly constructive in the handling of his story. He builds toward a future climax; he plans for a final catastrophe. His characters all play together towards a far-distant end, and every one of them must contribute his own part to this end. His interests constantly leap forward, and the final outcome is foreshadowed all along the road of march. But in the dramatic monologue this is not so. He has no forward look, no leaping ahead of his interest, no weaving together of human destinies, no crossing of human fates, all to be unraveled at some future time. The recital of what has already happened in the past or what is actually taking place in the present is much easier than the building up of an architectural whole out of a succession of events and varying emotions. To my mind, it takes infinitely more genius to write a good play than it takes to write a dramatic monologue. Tennyson, because of his outstanding

success with the monologue, was led to believe that the drama was also within his capabilities. With the single exception of "Becket," he failed to achieve success, and even his "Becket" is not as good a play as "Maud" is a dramatic monologue. Critical opinion is practically agreed that his dramatic works do not show Tennyson at his best. It is probable, if not even now a fact, that posterity will let "Queen Mary," "Harold," and "Becket" fall into as complete oblivion as has overtaken "The Borderers" and "Remorse."

Many, I might say practically all, of his editors and critics ignore his plays. In practically all of the critical studies of his poetry they are not even discussed. Many editions of Tennyson, although bearing the title "Complete Works," do not bother to include all of his dramas, although they were edited after the plays had been given to the world. The proneness of critics, even great critics like Stopford Brooke, to ignore Tennyson's dramatic poetry is an index or an expression of the general opinion as to the relative value of his poetical dramas in comparison with his other poetry. The critical world prefers to consider him as a lyrical poet, singing stirring stories with many voices by virtue of the dramatic power through which he was able to project himself into his many and various

characters.

Tennyson was seventy-six years old when he wrote "Becket," an old man nearing the end of life and art. Perhaps the success of this play alone would prove him, to some of his admirers, justified in attempting the dramatic form. It is such an excellent play that we wonder if it were written when the poet was thirty-six or forty-six, would the nineteenth century have left us a supremely great poetical play? As it is, "Becket" cannot stand with "Oedipus Rex" nor with "King Lear" as one of the great tragedies of world literature, nor can its author stand with Sophocles and Shakespeare as one of the great poetical-dramatists of all time.

The following letter to Tennyson from James Bryce, author of "The American Commonwealth", is significant of the fact that the play is more interesting to the historian than to the theater-lover:

"As I have been abroad for some time it was only a little while ago that I obtained and read your 'Becket.' Will you, since you were so kind as to read me some of it last July, let me tell you how much enjoyment and light it has given me? Impressive as were the parts read, it impresses one incomparably more when studied as a whole. One cannot imagine a more vivid, a more perfectly faithful picture than it gives both of Henry and of Thomas. Truth in history is naturally truth in poetry; but you have made the characters of the two men shine out in a way which, while it never deviates from the impression history gives of them, goes beyond and perfects history. This is eminently conspicuous in the way their relations to one another are traced; and in the delineation of the influence on

Thomas of the conception of the Church, blending with his own haughty spirit and sanctifying it to his own conscience. There is not, it seems to me, anything in modern poetry which helps us to realize, as your drama does, the sort of power the Church exerted on her ministers: and this is the central fact of the earlier middle ages. I wish you were writing a play on Hildebrand also. Venturing to say this to you from the point of view of a student of history, I scarcely presume to speak of the drama on its more purely literary side, how full of strength and beauty and delicacy it is, because you must have heard this often already from more competent critics." (1)

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(1) Memoir of Tennyson, by his son ; page 199

REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF THE POETIC DRAMA OF THE VICTORIAN ERA

Imitation of Elizabethan Romantic Drama

Perhaps the principal reason for the failure of the Victorian poetic drama is the fact that it is imitative of the romantic Elizabethan period rather than representative of its own age. Although it drew to itself the greatest creative thinking then in existence, it is not so truly distinctive of its age as the romantic drama is distinctive of the Elizabethan Age; the liturgical drama, of mediaeval Catholicism; Greek tragedy, of ancient Greece. The predominant literary form of any era is an expression, in itself, of the precise way of thinking and feeling and acting in that particular day. The miracle and the mystery embody the religious tenor of the popular mind before the Renaissance. The chronicle play embodies the new spirit of nationalism that surged through sixteenth century England, rising to full tide after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The prose of the eighteenth century is an indication of the materialism in thought, and of the extreme formalism in art which dominated that century. The Restoration Comedy is but an outlet for the coarseness and the lewdness of a corrupt nobility, and a vice-sodden aristocracy. The

Elizabethan drama, over and above its blank verse, its five-act structure, its platform stage and "cock-pit" playhouse, was more than all else an expression of the "temper of the age"; it was the pulse that recorded the heart beat of London. But the poetic Victorian Era was not so grounded in the life blood of its age. It was mediaeval and retrogressive.

The romantic dramatists turned to Shakespeare as to the sun. Thorndike says:

> "While the German and French romanticists found in Shakespeare an incentive to something new, the English romanticists could only elevate to omnipotence one who had long been the idol of the theaters. He was for them no innovator, but rather the unrecognized tyrant who held them back from real innovation." (1)

They saturated themselves in the plays of the great Elizabethans and paid them the homage of slavish imitation. But, as Thomas Beddoes, the most realistic of the Elizabethan imitators, warned his fellow disciples, it was a mistake to attempt to revive an outworn form. He says:

> "These reanimations are vampire-cold. With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think that we had better beget than revive, attempt to give the literature of this age an idiosyncrasy and spirit of its own, and only raise a ghost to gaze on, not to live with."

No dramatist can hope for success who fails to realize that the drama is not a static thing but a

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(1) Thorndike, Ashley: Tragedy

progressive art. I do not mean progressive in the sense of improving for, frequently, change in the drama has signified retrogression rather than advancement. But material conditions, social conditions, in fact life itself is constantly changing, and if the drama is to be a mirror of the age that produces it, then, naturally, it must change with it. A certain fluidity is necessary and healthful, but coagulation is fatal. The theater cannot stand still. Any dramatist who wishes to produce plays that are an interpretation of his age must study carefully the conditions peculiar to his own day and generation. He cannot use obsolete Greek models as Talfourd did; worn-out Elizabethan forms as Knowles and Taylor did; or themes unsuited to popular taste, like Tennyson's religious conflict in "Queen Mary," or Browning's seduction theme in "The Blot in the 'Scutcheon."

Failure to Express Temper of Age

The social order of the Victorian Age was as different from the society of Elizabethan England as the costumes were. Is it logical to suppose, then, that the same literary form which contributed most to sixteenth century needs would be the one most suited to the far different tastes, ideals, and aspirations of a more modern era? As we have seen, the Elizabethans found their greatest satisfaction and entertainment in the

poetical drama; for a more modern day, the prose drama may well have been the more acceptable medium. The dramatic spirit is subtle enough to find an expression in a great variety of types; its history through the ages is certainly a proof of its ability to wear many different and various aspects.

There are certain moods, emotions, situations, characterizations, even dramatic tempos existing in every age which a clever playwright is quick to grasp and utilize. For example, underworld situations, gun play, police raids, gangsters, "gold-diggers" of Broadway night life, chorus girls, green-room secrets, newspaper tactics are, at present, all waiting for the young playwright who knows how to recreate and reassemble plot combinations. Given small talent, he has very little to do if he stays within the narrow range of popular taste and attempts no more. Hollywood is filled with young men and women who know the trick of writing down to the popular taste. With this economy of effort, it is possible to have any number of fairly good dramatists producing rapidly. Clyde Fitch was a man who knew the "temper of his age"; so did Belasco; Philip Barry, in America, and Somerset Maughan, in England, both prove their ability to please a modern audience with sophisticated high comedy; Elmer Rice's "Street Scene" is another successful and

most skilful adaptation of popular taste.

Just so, in Elizabethan England there was an economy of effort which made for ease in the production of popular plays. A whole legion of clever men, with little genius for sincere dramatic creation, were enabled to write poplar plays by utilizing the trite situations and theatrical effects lying about upon the stage of their day. We might almost call it a dramatic formula, this assemblage of all the popular appeals and thrills of the day. Of even greater advantage was this formula to the geniuses of the age. Instead of wasting their talents and their years in hewing out a new form, and popularizing it, they had but to breathe the breath of life into the stereotyped drama of the day, and sublimate it into the higher realms of genuine art. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Webster were singularly fortunate. It was not their arduous task to create a new type for the drama; they merely picked up the form already enthusiastically acclaimed by their age, and carried it on to greater heights. They took the tawdry melodrama, the Senecan horrors, the crude situations of their day, and refined them into a drama that had subtlety, intellectuality, and genuine poetic beauty.

The task of the Victorian poets was far different. Browning, Tennyson, and Bulwer-Lytton did not find a popular poetical drama upon the stage of the day which

was there upon the stage, firmly entrenched, an evil to be reckoned with.

Accelerated Pace of Melodrama

Naturally, melodrama relied for its effects upon rapidity of action, tenseness born of concentration, vividness born of careful selection, upon immediate sensuous stimulation. But the poetic plays took account of none of these things. At a time when condensation and concentration were vital, they, as we have seen, sprawled loosely to great length. The speed of the poetical play is slower than the speed of the melodrama; it is a sort of symphonic music. Shakespeare's poetic dialogue is succinct; it carries on the action of the play, and never paralyzes the speakers. The Victorian romanticists, however, allowed their dialogue to proceed at a crawling pace with disastrous results. No better example of this general lethargy can be found than Browning's "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." Where this play, and others like it, labor along, choking themselves with words and losing themselves in introspection, the melodramatists of the day jumped swiftly into a whirl of inside machinery, the wheels of which spun rapidly about. Much of what passes for excitement in melodrama often proceeds from mere pace.

This lack of energy in the Victorian poetic play is one of the chief causes of its failure when it is

performed on the stage. All the long speeches die flat, and we have left only disjointed spots of action. These long speeches, moreover, constitute most of the play's length and eclipse the climactic spots of significant action. The power and tension of these fleeting moments of action are not potent enough to relieve the sterility in the long speeches and hence the play falls under its own weight.

It is most unfortunate that melodrama clung like a barnacle to the bark of romanticism. It is strange that every intellectual movement seems to have clinging to it parasitical growths which, at the same time that they are drawing their life-giving sustenance, diminish life in that which sustains them and bears them along. So it was with melodrama. Drawing its life from the new romance of wonder stirring through the world, by its very extravagance and crudeness, it destroyed a normal, healthly love in the strange, the wonderful, and the supernatural. The tawdry, false emotional values of melodrama converted a laudible humanitarianism, a true child of romanticism, into a weak sentimentalism, of value in no age. It also brought the theater into ill repute with the very people whose presence there was necessary to its existence on a cultural level.

George Bernard Shaw says:

"The conception of theatrical art as the exploita-

tion of popular superstition and ignorance, as the thrilling of poor bumpkins with ghosts and blood, exciting them with blows and stabs, duping them with tawdry affectations of rank and rhetoric, thriving parasitically on their moral diseases instead of purging their souls and refining their senses: this is the tradition that the theater finds it so hard to get away from . . .This is why, too, so many fairly intelligent and reasonable people regard a visit to the theater as an offence against morality, and others, who go to the theater themselves, do not consider that a clergyman can fitly be seen there." (1)

Didactic and Philosophic Tendency of Poetic Play

A brief comparison of the romantic drama of the Elizabethan Age with its revival and feeble imitation in the Victorian Era brings out very clearly the vigor of the one and the debility of the other. One vital difference between the Elizabethans and the neo-romanticists lies in their point of view toward the form with which they were working. With Tennyson, and Browning the drama is viewed as a means to an end; with Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Webster, it is an end in itself. Because the play was the thing to the mediaeval dramatists, an end in itself, they worked with concentration, with selection, with suggestion. The moderns, however, were working out a philosophy of life which they attempted to express through their dramas. Because they have a theory to expound, we have that finality of detail which is logical as an explanation of thought, but which lacks the theater's selectiveness. Beyond this limitation -- and far more important --

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(1) Shaw, George Bernard: Dram. Opinions and Essays, Vol.I

is the fact that didacticism inhibits a quick, true, and varied characterization because it puts the emphasis in the wrong place. The didactic dramatist is not primarily concerned with the intensification of human traits in the "together-drawing strands" of a crisis.

The French Revolution, the spread of democracy, the emancipation of the economic slave and the African slave, the spread of the franchise, the dawn of new republics, all this was seething and surging through the intellectual life of the times. Goethe's "Faust" embodies a philosophy; a philosophy in Tennyson's dramas inevitably takes us back to Tennyson; Browning ruminates, cogitates, and expounds, but as we have seen from our study of his plays, always it is Browning's philosophy of life that we get from the mouth of one character or another. A great dramatist does not make his dramatis personae embody his philosophy of life; he makes them replace it. With Tennyson the drama is a means to an end; with Shakespeare, it is the supreme end in itself. In Shakespeare, tragedy is an imitation, not of thought and philosophical theory, but of life; and life "consists in action and its end is a mode of action, not a quality." This subjectivity so characteristic of the romanticists lends itself to the lyric and to the dramatic monologue, but not to the drama. The drama must remain objective if it is to fulfill its function and mirror the life about it.

Shelley sang to his own soul, or sang of the formulas of Godwin to other souls imbued like his own with the love of liberty. But this emotional cry is the function of the lyric, not of the drama. If the drama is to embody a criticism of life, an interpretation of its age, then it must preserve its objectivity. To see an accepted social order beginning to break up about him, to see traditional ideas and beliefs go by the board is stimulating to the philosopher; the dramatist, however, works best in a social order accepted and stable. Although by the time of Tennyson and Browning the intellectual atmosphere was no longer "revolutionary," it remained still an atmosphere of highly reflective ideas, and therefore the "inward tendency" still asserts itself in their dramas. Of course, the human soul must always be of paramount importance in the drama, but theinterior soul is not enough; we must see, too, the actions through which it functions. The Greek drama and the Elizabethan drama were both imitations of the life of man as expressed in action; but the Romantic Revival of the nineteenth century was a drama of ideas, a philosophical drama, which has no place in art. "The moment an idea has been transferred from its pure state in order that it may become comprehensible to the inferior intelligence it has lost contact with art. It can remain pure only by being stated simply in the form of a general truth, or by being transmuted, as the attitude of

Flaubert toward the small bourgeois is transformed in 'Education Sentimentale.' It has there become so identified with the reality that you can no longer say what the idea is." Marston, Talfourd, Tennyson, and Browning failed to accomplish this fusion. We still know "what the idea is." The creation of their plays is not objective enough; it is seen through the magic glass of their own intensely subjective personalities. Their plays have a certain lyrical overtone; even the most tragic scenes, like the death of Mertoun and the death of Ion, are shrouded with a perceptible mist of subjectivity.

No poet of the nineteenth century, with the exception of Bulwer-Lytton, was able to get upon the stage an interpretation of life which was the crystallization of an author's mind, the simplification of all his thinking. In our own day we have playwrights, like George Bernard Shaw, Channing Pollock, Elmer Rice, Galsworthy, Brieux, and occasionally Eugene O'Neill, who put upon the stage a play which illustrates a social theory or which embodies a philosophy; but the thesis play, the philosophical drama, the drama of ideas, the play of which the "lesson" is its raison d'être, is never true art. The drama is a significant factor in social progress, not because of what it says, but because of what it assumes; it is significant, not because of what it argues, but because

of what it takes for granted.

The true dramatist never forgets, no matter how great the fascination in his ideology is for him, that the theater is a place of entertainment. Human character, human emotions, and human actions, not ideas or theories, grip us in the theater. If the persons of a play are not profoundly interesting in themselves, the situations in which they find themselves are without significance. "Queen Mary" and "Strafford" arouse no emotion within us, so we do not care what happens to them; on the other hand, the life story of a Macbeth or a Hamlet or a Romeo or a Lear tightens its hold upon us until we are irrevocably involved in the fates of these people. They are complex, sincere characters with whom it is impossible not to identify oneself. But with the exception of Richelieu, and possibly Becket, there is not a real significant character in the whole of the nineteenth century poetic drama, a character great enough to vibrate with life and self-determined action.

Victorian Poet-Dramatists Wrote for Intelligentsia

In the Victorian Era, as in our own day, the poet-dramatist wrote for the intelligentsia and not for the man of the street. He aimed to please the critics, the reviewers, and the literary world, boasting of taste, culture, and tradition. He aimed to express himself, his

theories, and his opinions. But the Elizabethan poet-playwright wrote for the "four million" as well as the "four hundred." The masses crowded to the theater as well as the classes, drawn there by an avid desire for entertainment. They wanted to be thrilled; whether or not that excitement came to them beautified with superb poetry did not trouble them. In fact, they could stand a good deal of poetry if they were being highly entertained at the same time. Joseph Jefferson once said: "You may have all the good literature you wish in a play--if it does not interfere with the play's action." This is precisely the way in which the Elizabethan audience felt about poetry. A poetic play cannot be literature unless the poetry is of true worth, but it is not the literary worth that makes it a success in the theater. A good story can be enjoyed by countless theater-goers who, though literary value and style are a closed book, can still react to the exhibition of life brought to them by the play. We did not need the cinema to teach us the value of pantomime. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, even though a play does not need literary worth, it cannot become supreme drama without it. Only language that is fine preserves a play as great literature.

The Victorian poet-dramatists, with all their regard for the Elizabethans, failed to recognize that the theater is primarily a place of diversion and entertain-

ment. Who could be entertained by "Strafford" or by "Queen Mary"? Who would experience any emotional catharsis upon witnessing the life story of either? Surely not the man of the street, and he, after all, will ever be the most important critic of the drama. The theater is a collective art and depends upon the audience as well as upon the playwright and the actors. In fact, it has sometimes been called an impure art because it is not the work of a single artist. The genuine dramatist's appreciation of his present audience is forcibly expressed by Noel Coward, a modern actor-playwright who has found the dramatic medium commercially profitable both in England and America.

"So far as I'm concerned, posterity isn't of any very frightful significance. If it were I think I'd become self-conscious and unable to work at all. We can't please everyone and I'm more anxious to please the people who live in the world at the same time I do than an insecure public of posterity. . .

" I have no pretentions to genius and don't care even half a damn about being a Great Creative Artist. I could no more sit down and say, 'Now I'll write an immortal drama'than I could fly, and anyway I don't want to. More than anything else I hate the pretentious highbrow approach to things dramatic." (1)

Dean Inge once said: "Literature flourishes best when it is half a trade and half an art." Liam O'Flaherty, who has just published a book on Bolshevism, makes this apology for his choice of subject which, although cynical

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(1) New York Herald Tribune, December 20, 1931

in the extreme, has yet a strong vein of reason. It shows very plainly the way in which a creative artist has to keep his eye on the literary market, if he wishes to sell his wares.

"Nowadays, owing to the growth of democracy and the machine, the profession of literature has ceased to be an art. It is an industry. Literary men, if they must eat by their work, are forced to watch the market and pander to the tastes of the public, just like any other class of manufacturers. Just as clothiers make green cloth, or blue cloth . . . in accordance with the change of fashion, so must novelists write about sex or adventure or the Yellow Peril or psychoanalysis. At the moment, two kinds of books are in fashion, autobiographies and books about the Bolsheviks. I refrained from writing an autobiography as long as I could. At last I was forced by hunger to do so. Immediately afterwards I realized that I had to scavenge among the Bolsheviks or starve a little later. So I set out for Moscow with black anger in my heart against the whole of human society, which has become so corrupt and democratic and indifferent to art." (1)

There is no doubt that Shakespeare regarded his dramatic work as much a trade as an art. Johnson would much rather have talked to Boswell than write, for he was mortally lazy, but he had to eat. Fielding's greatest work was done under financial pressure. Most of the plays of the Victorian poets, however, were written when their authors already had attained an assured position in the literary world through other media. They did not write plays with the idea of bringing their wares to market; hence dramatic supply and demand troubled most of them very little. When young Will Shakespeare came up to

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(1) The Saturday Review, October 17, 1931

London from Warwickshire and made his way to the "Globe," he was not at all concerned with writing the "poetic play." He yearned merely to write plays that the Elizabethan audience would applaud and pay to see. Impatient of restraint, eager to get into their work, the Elizabethan dramatists seized the most convenient medium that they could find. Blank verse was the handiest medium so they used it, naturally and without self-consciousness. Both tradition and practice had given them an extraordinary facility and skill in the use of blank verse,so with it they set to work to write the plays that would give a reasonable expectation of immediate and profitable popularity. But the blank verse rhythm that moved the Elizabethan Age to warmth left the Victorians cold.

Dependence of Dramatic Genius on Public Taste of Age

In the nineteenth century, melodrama had so vitiated men's tastes that they had lost their appetite for any other fare, as a man who uses strong condiments will soon lose all appreciation of natural food flavors. A great dramatist might have sublimated this tawdry melodrama just as Shakespeare sublimated the tragedy of blood into "Hamlet." But no poet dramatist of the nineteenth century picked up the crude raw material cluttering the stage of his day and attempted to fashion from it a work of art. The melodrama of the day pandered to the cheapest

elements in the popular taste. The poetic drama ignored it entirely; no attempt was made to strike a happy medium and "show the age and body of the time his form and pressure." Henry Arthur Jones says: "The drama should amuse and interest the populace, but it should interest and amuse them on an intellectual level." The crude avidity for amusement which animated the untutored man at this time was more easily and profitably catered to than the taste of the discriminating few. Naturally, commercialism dominates the actions of producers, and impels them to provide what they think the public wants rather than that which would improve and elevate public taste. No manager expends money to produce a masterpiece; the average theater-goer does not go to the theater to witness a contribution to English literature. Certainly if the tastes, predilections, and susceptibilities of the general public can be judged by a survey of the melodrama of the age, it must have been low, indeed. Coleridge in his essay "The Drama Generally, and Public Taste" stresses the close affinity of the drama with the peculiar "Zeitgeist" of the age in which it exists:

> "It is especially with reference to the drama, and its characteristics in any given nation, or at any particular period, that the dependence of genius on the public taste becomes a matter of the deepest importance. I do not mean that taste which springs merely from caprice or fashionable imitation, and which, in fact, genius can, and by degrees will, create for itself; but that which arises out of wide-grasping and heart-

enrooted causes, which is epidemic, and in the very air that all breathe. This it is which kills, or withers, or corrupts." (1)

Contrast in Lives of Victorians and Elizabethans

One of the main difficulties in the way of the romantic drama may be, after all, the dramatists themselves. How different their lives were from those of the Elizabethans they sought to imitate! The Elizabethans and the Greeks were either men actively engaged in great affairs or else in close contact with them. They were men who experienced the passionate life that they depicted in their dramas; men who rubbed elbows with the world; men who shared common emotions with their fellow humans living in the maelstrom of London. When we think of Marlowe, stabbed in a drunken brawl; Greene, who saw the mother of his child hanged upon the gallows; Massinger, too poor to buy food; Jonson, who had languished in a prison for killing his man in a duel, we do not wonder that through the Elizabethan drama flows the life blood of a people. But the Victorian poet-dramatists, with a few notable exceptions, lived lives of comparative seclusion, lives that were eminently respectable, contemplative, and sedate. They knew English lanes, quiet cathedral towns, and sober London streets. They had never

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(1) Coleridge: The Drama Generally, and Public Taste, in Literary Remains, Volume II

seen gory heads at Tyburn; they had not talked with men who had fought Spanish buccaneers on the high seas; they had never heard a sword clanging by their side; they had never walked with the vision of the headsman's ax before them like a terrible spectre. Naturally, these modern poets could not go back and reincarnate the vanished past. They had no overwhelming emotional experiences to bring to Londoners sitting in a theater begging for entertainment.

Victorian Poet-Dramatists Not Men of Theater

Although the romanticists were transported by the grandeur of Shakespeare's dramatic power, they had learned nothing, unfortunately, of the craftsman's art to which this splendid energy was subordinated. Not one of the Victorian dramatic poets was what we call a man of the theater. How different it was in Greek days when the actor and the dramatist were one! Thespis was an actor in his own plays; so was Aeschylus; Sophocles was, also, until his voice became too weak for him to carry on. Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Molière acted in their own plays. In fact, most successful plays are written by men who have an intimate knowledge of the theater gained, if not by acting, at least by close connection with it in some way. Stephen Phillips served an apprenticeship of six years as an actor; Eugene O'Neill tells of his childhood experiences when accompanying his father, the

celebrated portrayer of Monte Cristo, on his tours through the country. The wings certainly make a good vantage point from which to study the stage.

A playwright must have a technique as effortless as it is effective and, if it is not innate, it must be acquired by long years of association with the theater. No matter how much sincerity or intellectual and emotional vigor a poet may have, he is a failure in the theater if he has not technical skill, also. For example, the drama demands that the incidents of the story be developed swiftly and tersely through dialogue which is keen, pointed, and sharply-etched. Diffuseness may be all right in a novel, but it is deadly on the stage. All of the dramatists whom we have studied suffer from this lack of concentration. Discursiveness creates a tempo too dragging for popular taste. To not one of them could be given the praise which Scribe gives to Dumas fils. Dumas' plot development, said Scribe, exhibits a "mathematical progression multiplied scene by scene, event by event, act by act," until the conclusion is reached, a product "both fatal and inexorable."

Failure to Recognize Action as Dramatic Necessity

Edouard Bouret in the "Theater Arts Monthly for February,1931, says that the two fundamental qualities of a successful dramatist are imagination and theatrical feeling. "These two essential parts of the mechanism," says

he, "function together in incessant interplay, the latter controlling and constantly disciplining the former." No more striking example of the lack of a theatrical feeling, or a stage sense, in these poetical dramatists can be found than their failure to realize the importance of action in the drama. Action will always be of primary importance in the theater. Professor Baker points out that the young playwright recognizes this instinctively, and too often relies solely upon action to make his play go.

"When he thinks of drama," says Baker, "he thinks of action. Nor if we paused to consider, is this dependence of drama upon action surprising. 'From emotions to emotions' is the formula for any good play. To paraphrase a principle of geometry, 'A play is the shortest distance from emotions to emotions.' The emotions to be reached are those of the audience. The emotions conveyed are those of the people on the stage or of the dramatist as he has watched the people represented. Just herein lies the importance of action for the dramatist: it is his quickest means of arousing emotion in an audience. Which is more popular with the masses, the man of action or the thinker? The world at large believes, and rightly that, as a rule, 'Actions speak louder than words.' The dramatist knows that not what a man thinks he thinks, but what at a crisis he does, instinctively, spontaneously, best shows his character . . Is it any wonder, then, that popular vote has declared action the best revealer of feeling and, therefore, that the dramatist, in writing his plays, depends first of all upon action? If any one is disposed to cavil at action as popular merely with the masses and the less cultivated, let him ask himself, 'What, primarily, in other people interests me -- what these people do or why they do it?' Even if he belong to the group, relatively very small in the mass of humanity, most interested by 'Why did these people do this?' he must admit that till he knows clearly what the people did, he cannot take up the question which more interests him. For the majority of auditors, action is of first importance in drama; even for the group which cares far more for characterization and dialogue it is necessary

as preparing the way for that characterization and dialogue on which they insist." (1)

Action does not mean, of course, that the characters in a play must be continually moving about the stage, doing something or other. Since action is the dramatic expression of an emotion, marked mental activity may be quite as dramatic as physical action. To quote Baker again:

> "The fact is, the greatest drama of all time, and the larger part of the drama of the past twenty years, uses action much less for its own sake than to reveal mental states which are to rouse sympathy or repulsion in an audience. In brief, marked mental activity may be quite as dramatic as mere physical action. Hamlet may sit quietly by his fire as he speaks the soliloquy 'To be, or not to be', yet by what we already know of him and what the lines reveal we are moved to the deepest sympathy for his tortured state." (2)

Indeed, the dramatic force of practically all the famous soliloquies in Shakespeare lies, as in this one from "Hamlet," in the intense mental activity displayed while, in marked contrast, the character remains in a state of comparative physical quiescence.

Most of the Victorian poet dramatists lacked the genius to secure an emotional response to mental activity. Here we find the literary element unfortunately claiming our attention, and an aesthetic element like this will not generate intense emotion in the theater. Consequently, we find the poetic drama degenerating into closet drama, a

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(1) Baker, George P.: Dramatic Technique, chapter II, page 21
(2) Ibid., page 36

pitiful thing considering that real, vital drama cannot exist apart from the actual theater and the living audience that fills it. It would be an interesting experiment to try to act out, in pantomime alone, the bare story of some of these failures. I should like to see the experiment tried, for instance, with Browning's "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." Immediately the lack of opportunity for action would be apparent. Action is a dramatic necessity, and the well-made play always provides opportunity for it.

Lack of Appeal in Themes Chosen

Not only were the Victorian poet-dramatists lacking in craftsmanship and in a theatrical feeling, but they were deficient, also, in another indispensable dramatic requirement. They failed in their dramas to present themes which appealed to the consciousness of their day. They failed, also, to suffuse their plays with a warm, glowing humanity. They failed utterly to present to the general public portions of its own emotional life in adequate and lovely form. They forgot that drama exists for humanity; that it is great, appealing, and enduring only as it appeals to the human consciousness at large. Browning makes the sin of a fourteen year old girl the subject of his "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon"; Tennyson in his "Becket" reverts to dead issues like the old quarrel between church and state. Neither of these themes satisfies the Aristotelian theory that tragedy should make us

identify ourselves with the characters in the play, and thus let us experience an emotional catharsis through the pity or fear generated within us by the spectacle of their life sufferings. In order to effect such a purgation, tragedy must contain skilful characterization, and human conflicts which stir us to the profoundest depths of the soul within us.

Changes in Victorian Theater

The physical stage in the Victorian Age was another great obstacle in the path of its success. Prior to 1843 the presentation of dramas in London was a privilege restricted to three theaters, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket. On account of the monopoly that they enjoyed, these houses were so huge in size that what was uttered on the stage was inaudible in many parts of the theater. Because of these acoustic difficulties, spectacles became more popular than poetic tragedy. Performances commenced at seven, people were admitted at half price at nine, and often the night's entertainment comprised three plays. When Bulwer-Lytton's "Money" was first produced, "Foreign Affairs" and "The Boarding School" were included on the same bill. In the Renaissance theater the platform stage projected out into the audience so that the actor was surrounded on three sides by the spectators.

Rhetoric, oratory, and declamation were the order of the day; and rhythm gave to this verbiage dignity, power, majesty, euphony, and effectiveness.

The lack of scenery upon the platform stage forced the playwright to make up the deficiency by stimulating the imagination of his listeners. He painted his scenes in words, giving his audience elaborate descriptions which would enable them to visualize the background of the action. As the Elizabethan dramatists were also poets, these descriptive passages are gems of beautiful poetry. The Elizabethans lacked many things, but they did possess imagination. They welcomed the word-paintings avidly, and through the vividness of their rich, colorful, fertile imaginations, background after background formed behind the story of the dramas. Here is an exquisite passage from the "Merchant of Venice" in which Lorenzo, with a few deft strokes, creates a scene of gorgeous splendor about him. A blue sky appears above us, dotted with bright stars and gleaming constellations; the moon casts down her pale golden light upon the mossy bank where the lovers sit; Portia's palace outlines itself behind them, its warm radiance throwing a path of light out into the darkness. Soft music makes the night tremulous with beauty, and the glamour of the scene enfolds Lorenzo and Jessica like a

magic spell.

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it." (1)

With the advent of realistic stage settings, beautiful descriptions of this sort were no longer necessary, and one use for poetic beauty in the drama has gone forever. When realism entered the theater, certain changes followed inevitably. The smaller playhouse, the picture-frame stage, detailed realistic staging, all these were the natural consequences of realism, and all were, too, alien to the spaciousness, verbal richness, and suggestiveness of poetry.

Limitations Inherent in Star System

We might find a stumbling block in the way of the poetical drama in the modern actor. Since the days of David Garrick the drama has been all too frequently merely a means by which the actor can communicate his personality to the audience. He is not interested in good characterization, but in displaying his own talents. Even great actors

(1) Shakespeare, William: Merchant of Venice; Act V, Sc. I

like Macready were not above making the drama contribute to their own personalities. Under the star system it was the custom to give what was known technically as "the fat" to the one or two important players taking stellar roles. No theater can thrive when the stage star is of more importance to the public than the author. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as today with the moving pictures, the actors were the drawing cards to the theaters, not the dramatists. There were no great playwrights at that time, but the stage could boast of a group of its greatest actors:

Mrs. Siddons
Mrs. Jordan
John Kemble
Charles Kemble
Edmund Kean
Miss O'Neil
William Macready
Miss Faucitt

England had to wait until the middle of the century before such names as Jones, Pinero, and Wilde would fill a theater upon their reputation alone. The domination of the star is a pernicious influence. Actors should be judged not by their individual work, but ever in relation to the totality of impression received from the play as a whole.

Very few actors are trained to deliver blank verse effectively and beautifully. They have not the guidance of a fine ear for the line and the melody of the phrasing. They have no feeling for the "impressive march" of the

emotion in a passage. They attempt to deliver such music as if it were prose, hopelessly breaking the melody and wrecking the beauty of the verse. The "Theater Arts Monthly" for February, 1931, printed an abstract of Paul Valery's essay in which he tells the actor how to read poetry. He uses, frequently, the dramatic poetry of Racine as an illustration of his meaning. The essay is so pertinent to my subject that I am quoting him at some length here:

"When studying a piece of poetry to be read aloud, do not take ordinary speech as the source or starting point of your quest, to ascend from this flat prose to the required poetic tone; but base your tone on singing. . . . . The plain and current word, the utilitarian word, flies toward its meaning, towards its purely mental translation, is absorbed and melts into it like a seed into the egg it fertilizes. Its form, its auditory appearance, is only a halting-place which the mind passes without stopping. If the accent and rhythm appear, they appear only for the understanding, they interfere only momentarily, as immediate needs, as auxiliaries of the meaning they carry and which immediately absorbs them without any resonance, for it is their ultimate end.

"But verse has for its aim a continued delight, and it demands an intimate union of the physical reality of sound and of the potential excitements of understanding. It calls for a kind of parity between the two powers of speech. . . .

" Suppose for example, you are studying Racine. First, accustom yourself to the melody of the lines; observe closely the structure of those doubly organized phrases, of which the syntax on one side, the prosody on the other, compose a sonorous and spiritual substance and consciously create a living form. . . .

"Experiment leisurely, listen for the harmonics, the shadings, the reciprocal tones of the vowels, the subtle linking of the consonants. . . . Do not hurry to accede to

the meaning of the passage. Get closer to it without strain, almost imperceptibly. Reach tenderness, violence, only in and through music. Hesitate a long time before underlining words; there are no words yet, only syllables and rhythms. Remain in this purely musical state until the supervening meaning can no longer harm the mold of the music. You will bring it in finally, the supreme "nuance" that will transfigure the piece without impairing it. But first you must know the piece.

"The moment for meaning will come at last. You will discover your part and will work to create a character. Into this deeply learned and felt music you will blend as many stresses and accents as are necessary to make it seem to spring out of the affections and passions of some living being. . . .

"Soon you will find that you have to distinguish between lines. Some of them help the piece itself, of which they are indispensable parts; they announce, promote, unravel events; answer logical questions; allow the summing up of the drama, and are, in a way, on the same level with prose. It is a great art to pronounce these necessary lines. . . . But there are others which are the whole poetry of the work and express the soul of the poet. . . . " (1)

George Bernard Shaw says that the reading of Shakespearian blank verse demands "beauty of tone, expressive inflection, and infinite variety of nuance." Shaw in a criticism of a late Victorian performance of "Julius Caesar," given in London by Sir Herbert Tree, wrote:

"What is missing in the performance, for want of the specific Shakespearian skill, is the Shakespearian music. When we come to those unrivalled grandiose passages in which Shakespeare turns on the full organ, we want to hear the sixteen-foot pipes booming, or, failing them (as we often must, since so few actors are naturally equipped with them,) the ennobled tone, and the tempo suddenly steadied with the majesty of deeper purpose. You have, too, those moments when the verse, instead of opening up the depths of sound, rises to its most brilliant clangor,

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(1) Theater Arts Monthly, February, 1931

and the lines ring like a thousand trumpets. If we cannot have these effects, or if we can only have genteel drawing-room arrangements of them, we cannot have Shakespeare; and that is what is mainly the matter at Her Majesty's: there are neither trumpets nor pedal pipes there. The conversation is metrical and emphatic in an elocutionary sort of way; but it makes no distinction between the arid prairies of blank verse which remind one of 'Henry VI' at its crudest, and the places where the morass suddenly piles itself into a mighty mountain. Cassius in the first act has a twaddling forty-line speech, base in its matter and mean in its measure, followed immediately by the magnificent torrent of rhetoric, the first burst of true Shakespearian music in the play, beginning --

'Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.'" (1)

In our own day, disgust with poor renditions of this type has led men like Eugene O'Neill and Gordon Craig to wish to do away with the actor altogether. Masks, marionettes, puppets, and other similar devices have been suggested to render the actor's personality negative, but none seems to have aroused any enthusiasm in the commercial theater.

Effective Dramatic Dialogue

Very often, however, the author rather than the actor is at fault. The playwright fails to write for the actor speeches which he can render effectively from the stage. St. John Ervine says that many men fail to write good plays because they cannot distinguish between dialogue written for the ear and

(1) Shaw, George Bernard: Dramatic Opinions and Essays

written for the eye. A novelist writes dialogue to be read; a dramatist writes dialogue to be spoken aloud by the actor, and to be heard by the audience. We can read with pleasure many speeches which would be difficult to say. Ervine speaks of Shakespeare's remarkable skill in putting words together in such a way as to make an agreeable appeal to the ear. Even polysyllables which look formidable to the eye, cause the actor no distress and fall pleasantly upon the ear of the audience: "The multitudinous seas incarnadine." The actor's ability to send the speech over the footlights to its full function is known in the theater as "projection." But "projection" is not possible unless the dramatist has done his part for the actor by giving him speeches which contribute to the dramatic life of the play.

Eugene O'Neill tells us that, when he was pondering over revisions to be made in his trilogy "Mourning Becomes Electra," he determined to postpone his final decision until after he had heard the cast read the play. Then, he said, "it will hit my ear." (1) Unfortunately, the Victorian poet-dramatists were not sensitive enough to theatrical effect to estimate the full significance of this appeal to the ear.

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(1) O'Neill, Eugene: Notes from fragmentary diary kept by O'Neill, published by Horace Liveright in edition of "Mourning Becomes Electra."

Shakespeare's Histrionic Blank Verse

Shakespeare's blank verse represents a constant effort to secure increasing flexibility and variety. Much of the peculiar beauty of Shakespeare's verse depends upon the symmetrical distribution of accents within the pentameter line. Intentional irregularities of accentuation, variety in the placement of the caesure, the use of enjambments or run-on verse, the breaking of the line by a change of speaker in the middle of it, the use of stichomythia, the substitution of many spondees, trochees, and other variations for the iambus -- all this expresses his desire for that freedom from restraint that we are privileged to enjoy in prose. Yet by preserving metrical form Shakespeare gave himself free scope for that magnificent imagery which gives such a luminous glow to his poetry.

If Tennyson and Browning had taken histrionic blank verse where Shakespeare had left it, or if they had carried it on to even greater heights, as he had carried Marlowe's line on to greater perfection, the story of the Romantic Revival might have had a more brilliant denouement. Their histrionic blank verse, however, was a retrogression and not an advance. It was infinitely less capable than Shakespeare's of expressing complex, subtle, intense, and varied emotion.

Shakespeare's genius of expression is "universal" because he is capable of expressing every emotion that ever crosses the human heart. Professor Saintsbury says:

"Shakespeare has the perfection of expression in every direction and kind, the commonly called great and the commonly called small, the tragic and the comic, the serious and the ironic, and even to some extent the trivial (not in the worst sense, of course.) Whenever this perfection of expression acquires such force that it transmutes the subject, and transports the hearer or reader, then and there the Grand Style exists, for so long, and in such a degree, as the transmutation of the one and the transportation of the other lasts. It may persist, or cease, or disappear and re-appear, like a fixed or a revolving light, but there it is in essentia or in potentia.

"The great drama has got to face and reproduce life, character, action, and circumstance, in all their varieties, foul as well as fair, trivial as well as dignified, commonplace as well as exceptional. Tennyson attempted to clothe all in the Grand Style and offended against the sumptuary laws of art itself. The so-called classical drama of modern times has made this attempt, and the wiser judgment of the best periods of criticism has decided that it has failed. Shakespeare suits his style to his subject, and alternates the Grand Style with that which is not grand. But the grandeur of its grandeur when it is grand!" (1)

In his dramatic development, Shakespeare worked gradually from formal blank verse toward a medium which, although it preserved the form of blank verse as far as the eye is concerned, was to the ear really rhythmed prose, a "prose mesuree." He was no longer satisfied with the Marlovian line when he had reached "The Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest." It almost seems as if he had outgrown blank

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(1) Saintsbury, George: Shakespeare and the Grand Style

verse and was seeking some other medium of dramatic expression.

Shakespeare's Rhythmed Prose

The likeness of his prose to his poetry, and his poetry to his prose is obvious. Here are a few lines taken at random from "The Winter's Tale":

" . . . Prithee, bring me
To the dead bodies of my queen and son:
One grave shall be for both: upon them shall
The causes of their death appear, unto
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
Shall be my recreation: so long as nature
Will bear up with this exercise, so long
I daily vow to use it. Come and lead me
Unto these sorrows." (1)

How easy it would be to write this verse as prose:

"Prithee, bring me to the dead bodies of my queen and son. One grave shall be for both; upon them, shall the causes of their death appear, unto our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit the chapel where they lie, and tears shed there shall be my recreation. So long as nature will bear up with this exercise, so long I daily vow to use it. Come and lead me unto these sorrows." (2)

To say that poetry is a higher dramatic medium is perhaps a mistake; it is, more truly, a different medium. Could any blank verse be more exquisite, resonant with any finer melody, throb with more sincere motion than Hamlet's passionate prose outburst:

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(1) Shakespeare, William: The Winter's Tale; Act III, Sc. II
(2) Ibid.

"I have of late -- but wherefore I know not -- lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (1)

Congreve's Prose

Beside that, put this bit of Congreve's prose with its subtle symmetrical rhythm and its exquisite phrasing:

"I shall never bear that -- good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis: nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers; and then never to be seen there together again; as if we were proud of one another the first week, and asham'd of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange and well-bred; let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well-bred as if we were not married at all." (2)

Prose of Oscar Wilde

In the prose comedies of Oscar Wilde, we have a highly artificial medium; the phrasing is obviously not that of daily life. Sometimes the line is shortened; sometimes it is expanded to give cadence and even melody to the speech.

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(1) Shakespeare, William: Hamlet; Act II, Sc. II
(2) Congreve: The Way of the World

"LORD DARLINGTON. My life -- my whole life. To take it, and do with it what you will. . . I love you -- love you as I have never loved any living thing. From the moment I met you I loved you, loved you blindly, adoringly, madly! You did not know it then -- you know it now! Leave this house to-night. I won't tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world's voice, or the voice of Society. They matter a good deal. They matter far too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely -- or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands. You have that moment now. Choose! Oh, my love, choose!" (1)

Shaw's Poetical Prose

Mr. John Weaver has made a most interesting study of the prose of George Bernard Shaw and finds that frequently his prose speeches fall into "singing, lyric passages as authentically poetry as any of the purple passages in Shakespeare or Marlowe or Peele or Greene, or whom you will among the most expert wielders of prevailing iambic pentameter." He says:

"It was while I was listening to one of Alfred Lunt's speeches in the death-scene of 'The Doctor's Dilemma' that a familiar cadence kept impinging upon my ear; and to one who has spent no little time manufacturing blank verse of a sort, the recurrence of a beat in lines such as 'The people in Italy used to point at Dante, and say, "There goes the man who has been in Hell"', and 'You are the light and blessing of my life', could not but stimulate curiosity.

"Afterwards, then, with a copy of the play before me, I tried scanning some of the more beautiful speeches of the scene, arranging the lines according to where the pause for breathing or sense would naturally fall, and it seemed to me that the results made singing, lyric passages as authentically poetry as any of the purple passages in Shakespeare or Marlowe or Peele or Greene, or whom you will

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(1) Wilde, Oscar: Lady Windermere's Fan; Act II

among the most expert wielders of 'prevailing iambic pentameter'.

"Take the passage, for instance, wherein Dubedat urges upon his wife a different sort of mourning. I have said, 'prevailing iambic pentameter', and it seems as if my contention were rather well borne out, since, from twenty-four lines in this one speech, sixteen scan conventionally, while three more are no freer than many an accepted example from Edna Millay or Robert Frost or the other modern masters of the heroic measure.

"And all through that most impassioned scene, the lyric note kept singing through. I don't mean that much more of it fell into blank verse, though occasional lines suddenly did so. But there was a music which suddenly, charged with emotion, separated passages off from the surrounding prose, and became, as it were, arias.

"Take such a speech as Dubedat makes a few moments later, when his wife asks him to describe one of their precious memories, the evening when 'we saw the flames dancing in a bush in the garden'. His answer arranges itself into a free verse which certainly none of the poor Greenwich Village posturers could ever approach." (1)

The Irish Literary Theater

In 1899, two years before the Victorian Era came to a close, the Irish Literary Theater was opened in Dublin. The Irish dramatists associated with it were destined to do a great deal toward developing a new medium of stage speech called "poetic prose".

Synge's Melodious Prose

The prose of Synge falls upon the ear like music; the rhythmic ebb and flow of its cadences, or "curves" as Amy Lowell calls them, approximate verse. Here is a

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(1) Weaver, John: Poetry of George Bernard Shaw, Bookman, Vol. 67, pages 657 - 61, August, 1928

passage from "Riders to the Sea" (1904) which is without any regular meter, and yet the cadences fall upon our ears in clearly perceptible rhythmical waves. Certainly, the rhythm of the "wave-length" is intimately associated with the emotional response created by them within us. Synge's rhythm actually creates a subtle melodic accompaniment to the thought of the passage, and it possesses as much power to stimulate our emotions as if it were written in the more precisely measured rhythm of blank verse.

> "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way in the sea is when the other women will be keening. . . No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied." (1)

We see, then, that "rhythmed prose," can be swift, rhetorical, conversational, passionate, or quiet at the will of the dramatist. It is a medium artificial enough for art, and yet adaptable for stage purposes. The French have a saying: "L'art est par essence, absolument unintelligible au peuple." If this is true, then the drama cannot be cast into too artificial a medium for public appeal. Neither can it be tossed into a medium possessing no artifice whatsoever. Stage prose, no matter how much of a

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(1) Synge, John M.: Riders to the Sea

semblance of reality it possesses, is still an artificial diction although the ordinary man seated in the theater is, perhaps, unconscious of this fact.

Perhaps we are witnessing a welding together of verse and prose to produce a third medium which will come to be the vehicle of modern tragedy. In this poetic prose may rest the hope of the future. Galsworthy speaks of the dramatic current as drifting into this new "twisting and delicious stream, which will bear on its breast new books of poetry, shaped, it may be, like prose, but a prose incarnating through its fantasy and symbolism all the deeper aspirations, yearnings, doubts, and mysterious strivings of the human spirit. . . ."

While we have a medium opened to us capable of such beauty, we have not lost the impression of moods and the inflections of feeling conveyed by word-music. Such a medium can create beauty; it can touch nobility of conception; it can attain dignity of form; and, because it has a sense of life within it, its power and beauty will persist. However, people who need poetry will go on searching the stage for mirrorings of their own soul, for a spiritual catharsis which will help them to live more deeply and more intensely, for some cry of encouragement, some words of sympathy winged across the gulfs of time and death. To such as these the poetic beauty of the drama

is "a fire stronger than lightning and a grace more precious than rain". The poet who answers such a call, however, must not be an imitator but a creator. Realizing that a new era has opened up a new conception of man's position in the universe, he must seek to find a new medium which will not hamper and restrict his creation but contribute to a clearer and more spontaneous flow of creation.

SUMMARY

In this thesis I have attempted to discover the reasons why the poetic drama of the Victorian Era failed to achieve success in the commercial theater of its day. The main reason, obviously, is the fact that the Victorian poetic drama was imitative of the romantic Elizabethan period rather than representative of its own age. It was reactionary and retrogressive, also, in its choice of antiquated, classical, and mediaeval models, and did not possess a dramatic integrity of its own. The Victorian poetic dramatists, in imitating the Elizabethans, failed to realize that the same literary form which reflected so truly the sixteenth century was not the most effective dramatic medium for reflecting the changed complexion of the nineteenth century.

The poetic play, it was found, failed to take cognizance of the decline in aesthetic appreciation manifested in the popular demands for melodrama, spectacular effects, burlesque, and comic opera. It failed to adjust itself to the acceleration of tempo taking place in the life it sought to portray. The retarded tempo of the poetic play was not in harmony with the accelerated rapid pace of the melodrama dominating the stage of the day. More than all else, apparently, it was this lack of

energy, pace, and tension, which caused the failure which the Victorian poetic play met with when it was brought into the commercial theater.

Moreover, because this poetic drama was written by men who were subjectively minded, it was seen that too much time was given to ideas which had but little connection with the evolution of the chief dramatic interests. Motives, not clearly developed, detracted from the dramatic unity and debilitated the dramatic vigor of the play as a whole. Whereas the false sentimentality and acceleration of the melodrama were designed merely to amuse, exhilarate, and evoke emotional response from the uncultivated masses, the poetic play, too often was a thesis play designed to embody ideas fascinating to the author but not to the audience. The Victorian poet-dramatists wrote, it was pointed out, for the intelligentsia and not for the masses craving excitement. They failed to recognize that the theater is primarily a place of diversion and entertainment. Playwriting for them was not a commercial enterprise as their literary reputations were independent of their success at the box office.

Most of the Victorian poet-dramatists lived lives that were eminently contemplative, sedate, respectable and secluded, and hence, it was found, they failed to reincarnate

a romantic drama created by men who had actually lived in the midst of the passionate, colorful, stirring experience which they related.

Furthermore, it was seen that the Victorian neo-romanticists were not men of the theater and hence were deficient in theatrical feeling. One fails to find in their work the delicacy and the carefulness of a supreme dramatist's craftsmanship. Notably, it was found that these playwrights all lacked the ability to throw a subject into action; they lacked an instinctive talent for situations and dialogue; they lacked that vivacity of movement which is the most essential faculty of drama. Poetic description, quiescent beauty, lyrical passages of music and charm, long declamations of oratorical power, didactic discursiveness, abstruseness of thought -- all of these things, it was evident, slowed up the movement of the plot in a theater where action was vital and imperative. Dignity and impressiveness rather than swiftness and motion, reflection rather than action -- these it was obvious, were among the chief limitations of the poetic play. One rarely got that rush of events, that sense of anticipatory dread, that breathless suspense, which the melodrama, cheap as it is, manages to convey. The thoughts and emotions of characters took the place of action, and stories were told with epic repose rather than with dramatic

energy. Too often they lacked that vigorous action which arises from external causes visibly unfolded in rapid succession before the eyes of an expectant audience. This lack of theatrical feeling was found to be apparent, too, in the selection of themes unrelated to the interests, problems, and realities of the day.

Furthermore, certain limitations were noted existing in the theater of the Victorian Era which were not conducive to the success of the poetic drama. Because it ran counter to the trend of its day, the poetic drama failed to recognize the realistic influences gradually but swiftly usurping the theater of the late nineteenth century.

Many of the poet-dramatists, it was seen, lacked the ability to write effective histrionic blank verse. Their failure to provide the actor with good dramatic dialogue was all the more apparent because many of their contemporaries in the dramatic field were achieving notable success with a rhythmical prose which, as a dramatic vehicle, was proving most effective on the stage of the commercial theater.

My summary of the various reasons for the failure of the Victorian poetic drama, therefore, seems to demonstrate very clearly that it failed because it was not an interpretation and expression of the age that produced it.

Most emphatically, it was not in sympathy with the main currents at work in the theater of its own day. However, in its limitations lies, obviously, its most lasting merit -- it was written in defiance of the decadent theatrical taste that prevailed on the stage of that time. For the poetic drama of Victorian neo-romanticism the time was "out of joint" and, with the single exception of Bulwer-Lytton, there was not a poet born sufficiently endowed with dramatic genius to "set it right."

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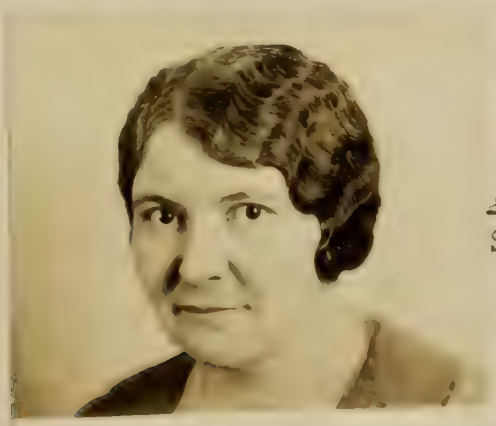
AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on May 25, 1890. Both my parents, Ann Ward Dunlevy and John Francis Donegan, were born in Boston. In 1908, I was graduated from the South Boston High School; and in 1912, I received my A.B. degree from Boston University, College of Liberal Arts.

After my graduation from college I was appointed Librarian in Charge of the City Point Reading Room, a branch of the Boston Public Library. While holding this position, I received my A.M. degree from Boston University in 1913, and was graduated from the College Section of the Boston Normal School (now Boston Teachers College) in 1914.

Since 1914, I have been a high school teacher in Boston. At present I am Head of Department in English in Charlestown High School.



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